

**FROM FALASHAS TO ETHIOPIAN JEWS:  
THE EXTERNAL INFLUENCES FOR CHANGE**

**C. 1860-1960**

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

The arrival of a Protestant mission in Ethiopia during the 1850s marks a turning point in the history of the Falashas. Up until this point, they lived relatively isolated in the country, unaffected and unaware of the existence of world Jewry. Following this period and especially from the beginning of the twentieth century, the attention of certain Jewish individuals and organisations was drawn to the Falashas. This contact initiated a period of external interference which would ultimately transform the Falashas, an Ethiopian phenomenon, into Ethiopian Jews, whose culture, religion and identity became increasingly connected with that of world Jewry. It is the purpose of this thesis to examine the external influences that implemented and continued the process of transformation in Falasha society which culminated in their eventual emigration to Israel.

The original research provides an in-depth insight into the processes which were set in motion among the Falashas during the course of the twentieth century. The thesis begins with a description of their religion, culture and identity before the Falashas' exposure to external influences, an analysis which is used to examine and interpret the modifications that subsequently took place in the Falashas' society. The missionaries' activities, which brought the Falashas to the attention of Western Jewry, are then examined. Considerable attention is devoted to Jacques Faitlovitch who was instrumental in developing the concept of an 'Ethiopian Jew.' His programmes and activities in Ethiopia and abroad, which were fundamental for the success of subsequent endeavours by Israeli organisations, are examined in detail. The Italian occupation of Ethiopia and its impact on the Falashas is also a topic thoroughly researched for the first time. Finally, the activities of Israeli organisations and their impact on the Falashas are examined.

The conclusions of this thesis are based on the results of both archival research and interviews with Falashas and key personalities who worked with them before the 1960s.

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Although the field of research has been somewhat different from that which was originally conceived at the time of the award of the Bursary, I sincerely hope that this thesis will none the less be viewed as an important contribution to Beta Israel studies.

Apart from references quoted, where due credit has been given to the appropriate sources, the views expressed in this thesis are my own and do not necessarily represent those of my sponsor or supervisors.

## INTRODUCTION

### THE 'DISCOVERY' OF THE FALASHAS

The Falashas' immigration to Israel in the years following 1984 has been seen by various individuals and organisations as the culmination of their long struggle to gain the recognition of the Falashas as Jews. Contemporary researchers have suggested that this process began in the mid-nineteenth century when the Falashas were first brought to the attention of the Jewish world.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to this period, the Falashas lived isolated from the rest of the Jewish world and unaware of its existence. Events that occurred outside Ethiopia and, in particular, developments among Jewish communities "had virtually no impact on their condition." From the arrival of the missionaries, however, and especially from the twentieth century onwards, "whilst the Ethiopian context rarely ceased to be decisive, numerous external variables came

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, K. Kaufman Shelemay, *A Song of Longing: An Ethiopian Journey*, (Urbana and Chicago, 1991), p. 34; J. Quirin, *The Evolution of the Ethiopian Jews: A History of the Beta Israel (Falasha) to 1920*, (Philadelphia, 1992), pp. 191-193; S. Kaplan and C. Rosen, 'Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel: Between Preservation of Culture and Invention of Tradition,' *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, vol.35 (1), June 1993, pp. 38-39; G.J. Abbink, *The Falashas in Ethiopia and Israel: The Problem of Ethnic Assimilation*, (Nijmegen, 1984), pp. 72-75.

increasingly into play."<sup>2</sup> Gradually, as we will see, these external factors began to alter and shape the Falashas' identity, society, religion and culture eventually to develop the concept of an 'Ethiopian Jew' "long before the majority of them reached Israel."<sup>3</sup> That is a Jew, first and foremost, who is of Ethiopian origin.

It is the purpose of this thesis to analyse the external catalysts which gradually transformed the Falashas into Ethiopian Jews from the mid-nineteenth century. This analysis was prompted by a challenge posed by Professor Steven Kaplan<sup>4</sup> who claims that the "entire process by which the Beta Israel became Ethiopian Jews remains to be examined."<sup>5</sup> I will commence my quest where Kaplan ended his book; "on the eve of Ethiopian Jewry's entry into World Jewish history" and conclude at a point when the process leading to the creation of an 'Ethiopian Jew' per se, as we now see in Israel, was well under way.

A documentation dealing with an apparent transformation of a peoples' identity should begin with an analysis of the

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<sup>2</sup> S. Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia: From Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century*, (New York, 1992), p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Kaplan and Rosen, 'Ethiopian Immigrants,' p.38.

<sup>4</sup> See Kaplan, *Beta Israel*, p.3.

<sup>5</sup> S. Kaplan, 'Beta Israel Studies Toward the Year 2000' in Kaplan, T. Parfitt, E. Trevisan Semi (eds.), *Between Africa and Zion: Proceedings of the First International Congress of the Society for the Study of Ethiopian Jewry*, (Jerusalem, 1995), p.16.

situation prior to their change. In order to analyse and interpret the modifications that took place in Falasha society, it will be necessary first to give an account of their religion, culture and identity before their exposure to external forces. In this first chapter, I will thus examine traditional Falasha life in Ethiopia to serve as a basis by which to evaluate the extent of their transformation in the twentieth century.

The sources for our understanding of the Falashas prior to the western world's discovery of their existence are scarce. Although the rulers of Ethiopia had their reigns recorded in royal chronicles,<sup>6</sup> "they unfortunately give no information about the religion or the cultural or social conditions of the Falashas, dwelling only on the campaigns of the Ethiopian Kings against them."<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, although the Falashas possessed a sizeable collection of literature, none of the texts which has reached scholars to date can be used to describe the Falashas' traditional religion and culture in any detail.

It is therefore inevitable that, prior to the arrival of the missionaries, our knowledge of the Falashas rests heavily on the writings of foreign observers. It should however also be noted, that "none of the texts prior to the middle of the nineteenth century is concerned with the Beta

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<sup>6</sup> These chronicles date back to the thirteenth century.

<sup>7</sup> W. Leslau, *Falasha Anthology*, (New York, 1969), p.ix.

Israel per se."<sup>8</sup> Instead, they often refer to the Falashas in the context of a wider issue which the author seeks to illustrate. What is more, the value of the sources of observers of the Ethiopian scene "varies tremendously with the knowledge and personalities of authors, the character of their involvement with Ethiopia, their opportunities of observing the events and their motives for writing about them."<sup>9</sup> None the less, in spite of the possibility of misinformation, one must turn to the foreign observers to gain a clearer picture of the Falashas prior to the influence of the catalysts of change.

Among the oldest reports generally considered to refer to the existence of Jews in Ethiopia are those of Jewish observers such as Eldad ha-Dani (ninth century), Benjamin of Tudela (twelfth century) and Elijah of Ferrara (fifteenth century). However, most of these accounts are reports of a legendary character that lack historical basis and are presumably based on hearsay. According to Quirin, they are in fact inconclusive "either in that they were really referring to Jews, or in the case of Jewish travellers, even that they meant Ethiopia."<sup>10</sup>

There have also been several accounts of Falashas living

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<sup>8</sup> Kaplan, *Beta Israel*, p.3.

<sup>9</sup> S. Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*, (London, 1978), p.16.

<sup>10</sup> Quirin, *Evolution*, p.21.

outside of Ethiopia. These have included reports by the sixteenth century Egyptian Talmudic scholar and Jewish legal authority, David Ben Abi Zimra (the Radbaz). In a reply to a series of questions concerning the Jewishness of Falashas brought to Egypt as slaves, he wrote that the Jews who came from the land of Cush are from the tribe of Dan and despite their similarities to Karaites, they could be accepted into the Jewish community if they adhered to certain Jewish laws.<sup>11</sup> Although this judgement would have very important consequences four hundred years later,<sup>12</sup> Radbaz's report does not reveal much information on the Falashas, as he neither visited Ethiopia nor discussed their religion and culture.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> M. Waldman, *Beyond The Rivers of Ethiopia: The Jews of Ethiopia and the Jewish People*, (Tel Aviv, 1989), pp.66-73.

<sup>12</sup> In February 1973, Ovadiah Yosef, the then Sephardi Chief Rabbi, issued a decree declaring the Falashas to be Jews. He based his ruling on Radbaz's *responsa*. What is more, secular writers have also used Radbaz to validate their historical argument. (See for example. D. Kessler, *The Falashas: A Short History of The Ethiopian Jews*, (London, 1996), pp.85-86). Kaplan therefore concludes that "it would not be an exaggeration to claim that these texts are the most important of any Jewish documents ever written about the Jews of Ethiopia and are a vital element in the construction of their identity as a part of the Jewish people." (S. Kaplan, 'History, Halakha and Identity: The Beta Israel and World Jewry,' *Israel Social Science Research*, vol. 10 (2), 1995, p.18).

<sup>13</sup> See S. Kaplan, 'Some Hebrew Sources on the Beta Israel (Falasha)' in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, (Cambridge, 1988), pp.199-208. Kaplan notes that with one or two doubtful exceptions, the Hebrew sources contain no firsthand accounts of Falasha life within Ethiopia and the accounts are brief and fragmentary. (p.199).

It was not until the Portuguese diplomatic mission of the sixteenth century to Ethiopia, led by Dom Rodrigo de Lima, that accurate reports of the country itself were first produced. This mission also established contact between Ethiopia and Europe which temporarily ended the country's long isolation from the rest of the Christian world.<sup>14</sup> The historian of this mission was the Portuguese priest, Francisco Alvarez, who resided in Ethiopia for six years. He was the first to have produced a "coherent and reliable work on Ethiopia which excited considerable interest in Europe."<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Alvarez failed to mention the Falashas in his reports. He did, however, write that "in no part of the kingdoms or lordships of the Prester John are there Jews."<sup>16</sup>

When the Portuguese mission led by Rodrigo de Lima departed Ethiopia in 1526, João Bermudez, a member of the expedition, remained in the country. Unlike Alvarez, his travel accounts<sup>17</sup> contain several references to 'Jews'. Once again, however, there is no actual description of the Falashas' religion or culture in his report, as he mainly refers to their skills as warriors.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> E. Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians*, (London, 1965), p.4.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> C. F. Beckingham, *The Prester John of The Indies*, (London, 1961), vol. 2, p.512.

<sup>17</sup> J. Bermudez in R.S. Whiteway (ed.), *The Portuguese Expedition To Abyssinia in 1514-1543*, (London, 1902).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

It was not until the arrival of a Jesuit mission to Ethiopia that more specific references to the Falashas are made. One of the Jesuits who went to Ethiopia was Manoel de Almeida who arrived in 1622, the year the Ethiopian Emperor Susneyos was converted to the Roman Catholic faith. Almeida was well received by the Emperor and was granted permission to study the country. Between 1628 and 1646, he wrote a *Historia de Ethiopia a alta ou Abassia* (History of High Ethiopia or Abyssinia) which Ullendorff considers an "important landmark in the history of the exploration of Ethiopia."<sup>19</sup>

Almeida noted that there had always been 'Jews' in Ethiopia and that although some had converted, the majority had "continued their blindness" and remained Jewish. The Falashas or Jews, as he also called them, were engaged in cloth weaving, making ploughshares and other iron articles. He described them as excellent smiths.<sup>20</sup> Almeida also claimed that the Falashas, whom he described as Arabs by race, spoke Hebrew, possessed Hebrew Bibles and sang Hebrew psalms in Synagogue.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ullendorff, *Ethiopians*, p.6.

<sup>20</sup> M. de Almeida in Beckingham and Huntingford (eds.), *Some Records of Ethiopia and Its People*, (London, 1954), p.54.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Kessler states that "confirmation for these statements is lacking and it is more likely that they mistook the Falasha dialect of Agau for Hebrew." (Kessler, *Falashas*, p.84). Wolf Leslau suggested that these Hebrew Bibles may have been brought by Jews who came to Ethiopia during or prior to the period of the Jesuits. However, he shares the same opinion as Kessler concerning the Falashas'



Almeida further asserted that the Falashas' ancestors came to Ethiopia following the captivity of Shalmaneser when Jerusalem fell to Titus and the Jews were subsequently expelled. He also professed that many of the Falashas were descendants of those who escorted Sheba and Solomon to Ethiopia.<sup>22</sup> However, Almeida did not discuss the Falashas' religious practices or customs, except when referring to those which the Christians also observed, such as circumcision. When he discussed this essentially Jewish ritual in the context of Ethiopian Christianity, he wrote that "Christians never seemed to have discarded Judaism entirely."<sup>23</sup>

Father Jeronimo Lobo, who came to Ethiopia in 1624, only mentioned the Falashas when he explained the reason for the 'corrupt form' of Christianity prevalent in Ethiopia. He explained that this 'corruption' was a result of a "separation from the Catholic Church and intercourse with Mohamedans, Jews and pagans."<sup>24</sup>

Later writers were to criticize the Jesuits for their failure to concentrate on the Falashas. In particular, the

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dialect. (W. Leslau, 'A Falasha Religious Dispute,' *Proceedings of The American Academy For Jewish Research*, vol. 16, 1947, pp.89-94).

<sup>22</sup> Almeida, *Some Records*, p.54.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.62.

<sup>24</sup> J. Lobo, *A Voyage To Abyssinia*, (London, 1887), p.72.

seventeenth century German scholar, Job Ludolphus,<sup>25</sup> wrote that the Jesuits "never took care to enquire when, or upon what occasion, the Jews came first to Ethiopia. What sacred books they use, whether with points or without points." Such information, he said, would be of great value to scholars.<sup>26</sup>

It was not until the second half of the following century that "the Falashas were 'discovered' for the Western world by the famous Scottish traveller, James Bruce."<sup>27</sup> He was the first European, after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1632-33, "to have attained a position of some importance in Ethiopia and to have contributed a great mass of valuable information to our knowledge of country and people."<sup>28</sup> Bruce detailed the results of his research in five volumes entitled 'Travels to Discover The Source of The Nile' which, according to Kessler, "casts a valuable light on the condition of the community at the time of his two year stay in and around Gondar in 1769 and 1770."<sup>29</sup>

As Bruce lived for some time in the Gondar region, he was

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<sup>25</sup> Ullendorff refers to Ludolphus as "the founder of Ethiopian studies." (Ullendorff, *Ethiopians*, p.9).

<sup>26</sup> J. Ludolphus, *A New History of Ethiopia: Being a Full and Accurate Description of the Kingdom of Abessinia*, (London, 1682), p.76.

<sup>27</sup> Abbink, *Falashas in Ethiopia and Israel*, p.73.

<sup>28</sup> Ullendorff, *Ethiopians*, p.12.

<sup>29</sup> Kessler, *Falashas*, p.85.

afforded many opportunities to meet Falashas, in whom he developed a great interest. He wrote in the first of his volumes that "I did not spare my utmost pains in inquiring into the history of this curious people and lived in friendship with several esteemed the most knowing and learned among them, and I am persuaded, as far as they knew, they told me the truth." However, he added that "it required great patience and prudence in making the interrogations and separating truth from falsehood for many of them (as invariably the case with barbarians) if they once divine the reason of your inquiry will say whatever they think will please you."<sup>30</sup> Bruce's task was also made more difficult because the Falashas possessed no written records.<sup>31</sup>

James Bruce categorically stated that the Falashas traced their origins to Solomon and Sheba. He wrote that "the account they give of themselves, which is supported only by tradition, is, that they came with Menilek from Jerusalem, so that they perfectly agree with the Abyssinians in the story of the Queen of Saba."<sup>32</sup> Bruce further asserted that the Falashas agreed with the other details of the legend, including the inauguration of Menilek, but challenged the

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<sup>30</sup> J. Bruce, *Travels To Discover The Source of The Nile*, (Edinburgh, 1790), vol. 1, p.488.

<sup>31</sup> Bruce was informed by the Falashas that their written records had been lost or destroyed in the course of various wars.

<sup>32</sup> Bruce, *Travels*, vol. 2, p.406.

Christians' claim that the Israelites' descendants became Christians at a later date. According to Bruce, "the Abyssinians by way of reproach have called this family Bet Israel, intimating that they were rebels and had revolted from the family of Solomon and tribe of Judah."<sup>33</sup>

Bruce expressed surprise over the Falashas' ignorance of Hebrew. He claimed they had informed him "that they came into Abyssinia speaking Hebrew, with the advantage of having books in that language, but they had now forgot their Hebrew and it was therefore not probable they should retain any other language in which they had no books and which they had learned to express by letters."<sup>34</sup> He described this reason as a "pertinent one" but it was "mere conjecture that the language which they spoke was that of those nations, which they had found on the Red Sea, after their leaving Judea and settling there."<sup>35</sup>

Bruce dwelled further on the subject of the Falashas' ignorance of Hebrew. He asked them, "since they came from Jerusalem, how it happened they had not Hebrew, or Samaritan copies of the law, at least the Pentateuch or Octateuch."<sup>36</sup> Bruce reported the Falashas' claim that they were in possession of both copies when they came from

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, p.485.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.487.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

Jerusalem but were subsequently lost. Therefore, the Falashas "were from necessity, obliged to have the scriptures translated, or make use of the copies in hands of shepherds, who according to them, before Solomon's times, were all Jews."<sup>37</sup>

However, Bruce was not entirely satisfied with this explanation. In his opinion, the absence of Hebrew literature discredited the Falashas' theory that they came from Jerusalem in the time of Solomon.<sup>38</sup> He further declared that it was almost impossible that "all the Jewish law, which is in perfect vigour and force among them, all their Levitical observances, their purifications, atonements, abstinences and sacrifices" had been dependent upon their memory for at least four hundred years until they were translated from the Septuagint.<sup>39</sup> Bruce recalled that even in Jerusalem, in the space of four Kings, idolatry prevailed and the law was forgotten. He declared that difficulties occurred on all sides as "it is not probable that a Jew would receive the law and prophets from Christians, without absolute necessity."<sup>40</sup>

Bruce also made many references to the Falashas in the context of general Ethiopian history, which he extracted

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.489.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.490.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.491.

from Ge'ez manuscripts. He discussed, in particular, the wars which had taken place between the independent Jews and the Christian Kings of the country. One famous battle took place near the Jews' Rock, "which is famous in the history of this country for the many revolts of the Jews against the Abyssinian Kings."<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, as Kaplan states, "Bruce's reliability as a historian should not be exaggerated."<sup>42</sup> Bruce indeed wrote that the region in which the Jews' Rock was located "[was] in great part possessed by Jews and there Gideon and Judith, King and Queen of that nation, and as they say, of the house of Judah, maintain still their ancient sovereignty and religion from very early times."<sup>43</sup> However, it is now generally accepted by scholars<sup>44</sup> that Falasha independence had virtually ceased a hundred and fifty years earlier, thus illustrating the exaggeration in Bruce's report.

Furthermore, many other historical accounts in Bruce's travel report were also marred by his arrogance. This caused him to exaggerate his own importance and, in

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., vol. 3, p.189.

<sup>42</sup> Kaplan, *Beta Israel*, p.46.

<sup>43</sup> Bruce, *Travels*, vol. 3, p.252.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, S. Kaplan, 'Leadership and Communal Organization Among the Beta Israel (Falasha): An Historical Study,' *Encyclopedia Judaica Yearbook*, 1986-7, (Jerusalem, 1988), pp.155-6.

particular, to claim for himself the honour of discovering the source of the Blue Nile. This was, in fact, a task that had been accomplished a century and a half earlier by the Jesuits whom Bruce is said to have hated "as some people hate rats."<sup>45</sup>

Finally, Bruce also failed to provide a detailed account of the Falashas' religious and cultural life, in spite of his reported intimacy with the most learned Falashas. Indeed, he simply declared in one volume that the Falashas "still preserve[d] the religion, language and manners of their ancestors."<sup>46</sup> Additionally, he wrote that they "have never heard of talmud, targum, or Cabalah and neither have they any fringes or ribband upon their garments nor is there as far as I could learn one scribe among them."<sup>47</sup> In general, he asserted that the Falashas were not fond of talking of their religion.<sup>48</sup>

In short, to rely on Bruce's *Travels To Discover The Source of The Nile* to provide an accurate portray of the Falashas in the eighteenth century would be a mistake. Bruce himself admitted that he required the help of the learned to clarify various aspects of the Falashas.<sup>49</sup> The most

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<sup>45</sup> P. Caraman, *The Lost Empire*, (London, 1985), p.17.

<sup>46</sup> Bruce, *Travels*, vol. 3, p.190.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, p.486.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.488.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.490.

important function of his travel reports would appear to be a vehicle for awakening European interest in Ethiopia in general and in the Falashas in particular. "The stimulus he gave to Abyssinian studies became the basis on which so much has been built."<sup>50</sup> Hence, although thirty years were to pass before further exploration was attempted in Ethiopia, his impact can be said to have began a new era.<sup>51</sup>

During the first half of the nineteenth century, a number of expeditions arrived in Ethiopia, encouraged by a revived interest in the academic study of the country. This brought about "the publication of a number of fundamental works in this sphere" on which a basis was created to establish these studies "as a proper university discipline."<sup>52</sup> In this period, a number of detailed, semi-accurate accounts of the Falashas' traditional life were also produced. Since these reports were written prior to the watershed in the Falashas' history, "a snapshot of the people in the nineteenth century will provide a useful basis from which to discover how they reached this turning point, and what has happened since."<sup>53</sup>

The first observer to shed any new light on the Falashas after James Bruce was the Swiss Protestant, Samuel Gobat.

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<sup>50</sup> Ullendorff, *Ethiopians*, p.14.

<sup>51</sup> Kaplan, *Beta Israel*, p.107.

<sup>52</sup> Ullendorff, *Ethiopians*, p.15.

<sup>53</sup> Quirin, *Evolution*, p.1.



He was sent to Ethiopia by the Church Missionary Society in 1826. Gobat, at first, did not specifically single out the Falashas for future missionary effort, as his primary interest was in the Amharas.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, in his *Journal of a Three Years Residence In Abyssinia*, he reported several dialogues he held with Falashas.

Gobat refers to the Falashas in his book as "an ignorant and besotted people"<sup>55</sup> who "do not know of what tribe they are; nor have they any adequate idea as to the period when their ancestors settled in Abyssinia."<sup>56</sup> Gobat reported that some claim to have arrived with Menilek, the son of Solomon,<sup>57</sup> whilst others believe they settled in Abyssinia after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.<sup>58</sup> Gobat described a Falasha's surprised reaction when he was informed of the existence of 'other' Jews in the world.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Abbink, *Falashas in Ethiopia and Israel*, p.74.

<sup>55</sup> S. Gobat, *Journal of a Three Years Residence In Abyssinia*, (London, 1850), pp.263, 279, 467. Gobat comments in the conclusion of his journal that the Falashas' ignorance stems from their unfamiliarity with the Ethiopian language, in which most of their books are written. (p.468)

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p.467.

<sup>57</sup> Gobat comments later on in his journal that the numerous fables or legends concerning Solomon and Sheba "are too ridiculous to secure rational confidence; and although they are received with the same deference by the Christian as by the Jew, they are really unworthy of the least regard." (p.467)

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.267.

On a visit to a Falasha village, he asked to see their 'Rabbi' in order to examine the Falashas' literature and put forth several questions. He was subsequently shown a book of psalms, which included 'The Praises of Mary' that "the Christians [had] added, together with all the repetitions of 'In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.'"<sup>60</sup> He also examined a book which dealt with the Sabbath in one half and 'the Prophecy of Gorgorious' and 'the book of Enoch' in the other. To a question as to whether the Falashas possessed books in Hebrew, Gobat was informed that they had "the Law" but owing to their present troubles, they had hid that together "with some other books."<sup>61</sup> Gobat also comments in the conclusion of his book that the Falashas also had one book of prayers in their peculiar dialect.<sup>62</sup>

Gobat initially questioned the 'Rabbi' about the tribe to which the Falashas belonged and was subsequently informed that they were from the tribes of Levi and Judah. He then asked him about the expectation of the Messiah to which the religious leader responded, after some confusion, that "this was to be Theodore" whose time of arrival was unknown as "some say the time is near; others that it is still distant."<sup>63</sup> Gobat concluded that the issue of the Messiah,

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.277.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.279.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p.468.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

did not "awaken in their minds any strong or lively interest" and as to whether he would be a Christian or Jew "is a point about which the poor Falashas have formed no definite opinion."<sup>64</sup> None the less, Gobat also comments that "in regard to the person of Jesus Christ, they indulge the same intense hatred, which is felt by the Jews in every land."<sup>65</sup>

During his expedition, Gobat attempted to dispel the rumour, prevalent among the Christians, that the Falashas were associated with the 'buda' or 'malevolent spirits' and could change themselves into hyenas. In reply to a priest who put forward this remark, he claimed that the accusation stemmed from a lack of faith. He stated that "if boudas exist, you are obliged to believe that they can do nothing contrary to the will of God and consequently cannot harm those who have true faith in God." Therefore, according to this viewpoint, the priest's "groundless fear of buddas" only proved his "total want of faith in the God of Israel."<sup>66</sup>

Apart from the above comments, Gobat has nothing more to say about the Falashas. He noted that "very little is known of them"<sup>67</sup> since they did not have much contact with those

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p.467.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p.335.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.466.

who profess Christianity. Therefore, "neither their religious dogmas nor their social customs are well understood by the latter."<sup>68</sup> Secondly, on questioning ordinary Falashas about their history, present conditions or doctrinal beliefs, he was frequently advised to approach one of their learned men. However, Gobat asserted that he experienced great difficulty in finding such men.

None the less, according to Philoxene (Filosseno) Luzzatto, an Italian Jewish scholar, Gobat's dialogues with the Falashas were "very interesting and show us, what the most minute description could not make so apparent, how much the moral and religious sentiments are developed in the Falashas."<sup>69</sup>

The next foreign observer who is worthy of mention here is Charles Beke, the English geographer and bible critic. Beke travelled extensively in Ethiopia between 1840-43 and also made contact with the Falashas during his expeditions. Unlike previous observers, Beke was of the opinion "that there seems to be little doubt that the Falashas of Abyssinia belong to the sect of Samaritans" because of the similarities between the observances and customs of the two sects. However, he was unsure "when and how their religion was introduced into that portion of Africa" as "it is a

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p.467.

<sup>69</sup> P. Luzzatto, 'The Falashas or Jews of Abyssinia,' *Jewish Chronicle* (hereafter: *JC*), 31 October 1851, p.28.

question which we do not at present possess the means of deciding."<sup>70</sup>

A year later, Beke wrote another account of the Falashas in the Jewish Chronicle. He began his report by stating that "here and there over almost the entire country are found the scattered remnants of a once numerous Israelitish people who still retain the religion of their ancestors, though in an extremely debased form."<sup>71</sup> He was not convinced that the Falashas were descended from any of the tribes of Israel as their peculiar language (which he rightly claimed was related to existing dialects spoken by the Agaws) affords "a strong argument in support of the opinion that these people are descended from an aboriginal race."<sup>72</sup> He is also rather critical of Bruce's accuracy in his article, especially concerning the legend of the descent of the Imperial house of Ethiopia from Menilek, the alleged son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Indeed, he considered this account as one based on only "a substratum of truth."<sup>73</sup>

A year later, in the same Jewish newspaper, another article

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<sup>70</sup> Letter by C. Beke to the Jewish Chronicle of February 19 1847, p.83, reproducing an extract from his article in *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, vol. 14, p.55.

<sup>71</sup> C. Beke, 'Remarks on the Matshafa Tomar,' *JC*, 31 March 1848, p.485.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.486.

on the Falashas was published. This time it took the form of an interview with the Frenchman, Antoine d'Abbadie, who together with his brother, Arnould, had spent eleven years in Ethiopia from 1837.<sup>74</sup> As well as contributing extensively to several fields of Ethiopian studies, Antoine d'Abbadie was the first foreign observer to undertake a detailed analysis of the Falashas. According to Hess, d'Abbadie "made a point of seeking out Falasha informants" unlike Bruce "who had casually interviewed several Falashas during his stay in Gondar."<sup>75</sup> Therefore, as a result of his painstaking research, it is possible to reconstruct the most accurate picture of traditional Falasha life to date.<sup>76</sup>

In the interview with the Jewish Chronicle, d'Abbadie stated that the Falashas, "entertain some extraordinary notions altogether incompatible with Judaism as understood by other Jews," such as celibacy and suicide.<sup>77</sup> D'Abbadie

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<sup>74</sup> A. d'Abbadie, 'The Jews in Abyssinia,' JC, 16 November 1849, p.43.

<sup>75</sup> R.L. Hess, 'An Outline of Falasha History,' *Proceedings of The Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, (Addis Ababa, 1969), vol.1, p.107.

<sup>76</sup> According to Kessler, the replies to d'Abbadie's questions (presented by Luzzatto) represented "pure Falasha tradition," which could still be found in the outlying villages, "before Western contacts had begun to influence the thinking of Falasha leaders." (Kessler, *Falashas*, p.111).

<sup>77</sup> He discovered that suicide was an act the Falashas deemed as highly meritorious under certain circumstances. When d'Abbadie enquired as to the biblical origins of celibacy, he was directed to the account of the prophet Elijah, who in their (incorrect) opinion never married.

further asserted that the Falashas were totally unacquainted with Hebrew. Rather, they read the scriptures in their native language and claimed they were translated from Arabic. Nevertheless, he still believed that "a good Hebrew scholar might trace many Hebrew words" in the Falashas' liturgy.

D'Abbadie continued by presenting an account of their literature. He reported that the Falashas considered the Apocrypha sacred "besides books held by all Jews as authoritative." D'Abbadie was of the opinion that these texts corresponded with the Vulgate versions apart from the book of Maccabees, in which he discovered great discrepancies. Perhaps the most striking episode in d'Abbadie's interview is his account of meeting a young Falasha who "was most anxious to go to Europe in order to acquire the correct notions in Judaism which on return to his native country might be propagated among his brethren."<sup>78</sup>

This interview was not the only report on the Falashas produced by d'Abbadie. His main contribution to an understanding of the Falashas in the first half of the nineteenth century was a response to a questionnaire produced by Filosseno Luzzatto, a representative of "the first small interest of European Jewry in the discovery of

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<sup>78</sup> D'Abaddie, 'The Jews in Abyssinia,' p.43.

Ethiopian Judaism."<sup>79</sup> Luzzatto's interest in the Falashas arose from Bruce's *Travels* which he read at the age of thirteen. On hearing about d'Abbadie's work in Ethiopia from a letter he wrote in *Journal des Débats* in 1845, Luzzatto contacted the Frenchman who was in Ethiopia at the time.

Luzzatto considered d'Abbadie "the most learned, the most courageous and the most indefatigable of all the travellers who have visited Abyssinia." He therefore assigned him the task of lifting "a corner of the veil, so hermetically closed that had covered the Falashas."<sup>80</sup> In Luzzatto's letter to d'Abbadie, he commented that his survey in *Journal Des Debats* on the exposition of the religion of the Falashas left much to be desired. He asserted there was much confusion evident in some portions of it stemming "from the ignorance of those who furnished d'Abbadie with his information."<sup>81</sup> None the less, Luzzatto also professed that the article provided "a clearer idea of the dogmas, ceremonies, festivals and fasts of the Falashas, than all the accounts which had been furnished by preceding

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<sup>79</sup> Hess, 'An Outline,' p.107.

<sup>80</sup> JC, 31 October 1851, p.28.

<sup>81</sup> F. Luzzatto, 'The Falashas or Jews of Abyssinia,' JC, 7 November 1851, p.34. D'Abbadie, in a preface to the questionnaire, wrote that "certain practices which indicated a mixture of Christianity with the ancient faith of the Falasha ... naturally casts doubt upon the veracity of him from whom I had obtained my information." (JC, 26 September 1851, p.404).



travellers."<sup>82</sup>

Luzzatto sent d'Abbadie a long list of questions to be filled in by Abba Ishaq, "the spiritual chief and the most learned of the Falashas."<sup>83</sup> Through this questionnaire, Luzzatto hoped to gain a full knowledge of the condition of the Falashas and to discover "whether they are in reality of Jewish origin, or how far they may be connected with the house of Israel."<sup>84</sup> The reply to Luzzatto's communication took two years to reach him. Finally, in 1851 the returned questionnaire was printed in the French quarterly journal, *Archives Israelites*, and in the same year translated into English and published in the *Jewish Chronicle*.

The list of Luzzatto's questions to Abba Ishaq began with one concerning the Falashas' establishment in Ethiopia. Contrary to his own opinion,<sup>85</sup> he was informed by Abba Ishaq through d'Abaddie that the Falashas "came with Solomon. Zogo, the son of the servant of the Queen of Sheba, is the father of the Liquant. We came after Jeremiah the prophet. We came under Solomon. We came by Sannar,

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<sup>82</sup> Luzzatto, 'The Falashas or Jews of Abyssinia,' *JC*, 7 November 1851.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>84</sup> D'Abbadie, *ibid.*, 26 September 1851, p.404.

<sup>85</sup> Luzzatto believed that the Falashas came to Ethiopia after the destruction of the first temple and considered the myth of descent from Solomon and Queen of Sheba to stem from "the ignorant among our brother Jews of Abyssinia." (*Ibid.*, p.405).

thence to Axum. The world remained under one faith for 5500 years before Jesus Christ. We most certainly came under Solomon."<sup>86</sup> Abba Ishaq also later declared that the Falashas "belong to a mixture of twelve tribes, of which each one sent an elder son to accompany Minylik."<sup>87</sup>

Luzzatto was advised by Abba Ishaq that the Falashas (as Abba Ishaq referred to them although he later calls this term "an affront"<sup>88</sup>) had no written history and the "sistres and all the customs of the Christian Church, with the exception of the cross, are borrowed from the Falashas."<sup>89</sup> In reply to a question by Luzzatto concerning the Falashas' calendar, festivals and fasts, Abba Ishaq gave d'Abbadie a detailed analysis of their religious year, which would appear to be the first survey of its kind. Indeed, he goes through each month and details (albeit in a rather confusing manner) all the major events that fall in each one<sup>90</sup>:-

(I) Nesan is the name of the first month. On the 14th (the day when the Red Sea was crossed) a sacrifice is made in the evening. The following day is a holy day

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 10 October 1851, p.4.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> D'Abbadie, however, did not describe how the Falashas observed the various festivals and it was subsequently left to later writers to fill in the gaps.

and also a fast day.

(II) Fifty days later, the festival of Mai-irar is observed.

(III) The fourth Saturday of the fifth moon is the most important Sabbath of the year. God is supposed to come down to earth on this day when "all good works have full effect."<sup>91</sup> On this festival known as 'Barabu,' the Falashas partake in a type of confession to the Falasha priests.

(IV) On the first day of the seventh moon the festival known as Ba'al Matki or 'festival of drums' falls. Ten days later the 'Astaro' or 'the festival of the appearance of God to David' occurs. This is followed five days later by the 'Feast of Tabernacles'.

(V) On the twelfth day of the tenth moon the festival called 'Ma-irar' occurs on which occasion tithes are given to the priests.

(VI) On The eighteenth day of the eleventh month the Festival of the Commemoration of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is observed.

(VII) The tenth day of each month is known as Arfe

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<sup>91</sup> JC, 3 October 1851, p.410.

Ascart and is a secret feast established by the priests who survived the destruction of Jerusalem.

(VIII) On The twelfth day of each month the feast of St. Michael occurs.

(IX) The fifteenth day of each month is known as 'Chiki Ankua'. It commemorates Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles.

(X) The last day of each month is observed as the festival of 'Amato So.' On that day (which is also a fast day) the Falashas go on a pilgrimage or pray on the mountains.

(XI) Commencing with the Sabbath following Passover, which is known as the 'Sabbath of Grace' and continuing every seventh Sabbath, those who offer prayers or do good deeds are by those acts absolved from their sins.

(XII) The fast of Tamuz is observed for the first nine days in the fourth moon and was instituted after the taking of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in the reign of King Sedecias.

(XIII) Av is a fast of seventeen days in the fifth moon but it is not observed on the intermediary

Sabbaths. This fast was instituted by Isaiah and observed by the three other great priests for the sins of Manasseh, son of Ezechias.

(XIV) Lul is a fast that falls in the sixth month and lasts for ten days (excluding intermediary Sabbaths). It was instituted by Jeremiah after his imprisonment.

(XV) The nine days prior to the festival of 'Astarion' is the fast of 'Tahasaran.' On these days, food is permitted only in the evening and on the Sabbath. It was instituted after a divine vision by Esdras on his return to Jerusalem.

(XVI) Haddar is a fast that was instituted by Abba Sivra and falls on the first nine days of the tenth month.

(XVII) 'Zoma Aster' is a fast of ten days instituted by Esther and commences with the eleventh moon.

(XVIII) Mondays and Thursdays are always observed as Fast days (with greater emphasis laid on Thursdays). The Monday fast day was instituted by Abba Battui and Thursday's by Isaiah.

(IX) The fast of Friday, which was instituted by Moses, is observed by the 'educated Falashas.'

D'Abbadie also questioned Abba Ishaq on the Falashas' interpretation and observance of the biblical commandments which refer, according to Jewish oral traditions, to the four species used on the festival of Tabernacles<sup>92</sup> and phylacteries.<sup>93</sup> Abba Ishaq replied that firstly, fruits were scarce and thus they "take no account of these precepts" although they do "acknowledge the precept" by gathering certain palms and branches. Secondly, he stated that "we write our precepts upon the doors of our temples and would write them upon our hands but the water effaces our ink."<sup>94</sup>

D'Abbadie then began the task, assigned to him by Luzzatto, to search for evidence of Hebrew usage amongst the Falashas. On several occasions, he asks Abba Ishaq to detail, or preferably to present, to d'Abbadie the books they possess in Hebrew, in order to learn if the laws are the same. However, each time he was informed by Abba Ishaq that "our laws are written in Gi'iz and we have no knowledge of Hebrew."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> "And on the first day you shall take of the fruit of a noble tree, palm branches, and of a thick tree, and willows from the torrent and rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days." (Leviticus chapter 23, verse 40).

<sup>93</sup> "And you shall place my precepts upon your heart and your soul and you shall bind them for a sign upon your hands and for a mark between your eyes." (Deuteronomy chapter 6, v.8).

<sup>94</sup> Luzzatto, *JC*, 10 October 1851, p.4.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

With regards to the Falashas' view on the Messiah, Abba Ishaq informed d'Abbadie that "Theodoros is our Messiah" who will be "the son of David, and will be born in the country called Azzaf near the Euphrates, a day and a half journey from Jerusalem."<sup>96</sup> He also learnt that the Falashas believe in heaven (albeit seven types) and hell and also in the resurrection from the dead.

The marriage laws, according to Abba Ishaq, were rigid. He asserted the Orit (law) stipulates that a Falasha is allowed only one wife in his lifetime, as the husband and wife will meet each other again in paradise. This contradicts traditional Jewish practice which, as Luzzatto pointed out, stipulates that a man should marry the widow of his deceased brother if he died without children.

In addition to the questions put forward by Luzzatto, his letter to d'Abbadie contained remarks on certain aspects of the Falashas' religion<sup>97</sup> which d'Abbadie also endeavoured to clarify in the course of his research. I list below some of the replies that were given to him by another informant, Zaga Amlak, which were later approved by Abba Ishaq:-

(I) Monasticism was instituted as a result of the

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> It would appear from the answers given to d'Abbadie that Luzzatto's remarks dealt with the differences between the Falashas' religion and traditional Judaism and in particular, the former's similarities to Christianity.

relaxation of the Falashas' morals in spite of the fact that celibacy is contrary to the laws of Moses.

(II) Circumcision is generally performed on the seventh day despite the Falashas' recognition that this was contrary to the biblical account. Their Law (Orit) states that "he who has not been circumcised before the eighth day is not counted among the children of Israel." However, if the seventh day falls on the Sabbath, they postpone the ritual until the following day as the Falashas' believe the shedding of blood on the Sabbath is prohibited.<sup>98</sup>

(III) The ceremony called Ardi-it is according to d'Abbadie's informant, only a purification and not a baptism. It is performed after a Falasha has become impure following, for example, contact with a dead person.

(IV) The tradition of confession practised among the Falashas, was justified to d'Abbadie by referring to the law at the beginning of Leviticus which states, "Tell your sins to the priests."

(V) The Falashas' non-observance of the law of Shmitta (the agricultural sabbatical when land is left fallow

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<sup>98</sup> Traditional Jewish law allows circumcision to take place on the Sabbath and the ritual is only postponed from the eighth day if the infant is unwell.



every seventh year) was explained by the fact that the Falashas do not have patrimony and also have to give a fifth of the produce of the earth they cultivate to the proprietor of the land.

Finally, d'Abbadie was asked by Zaga Amlak to inform the "Falasian of Europe" about the Falashas' plight. Zaga Amlak urged representatives of the Jewish world to establish contact with the Falashas since they were unable to travel because of the law which prevented them from travelling by sea on the Sabbath.<sup>99</sup> Although, the Falashas considered their faith to be the true faith, Zaga Amlak asked that "if we lack anything, send and tell us."

Although d'Abaddie collected a good deal of information during the course of his research on the Falashas, he abstained from commenting on the replies given to him by his informants. It was therefore left to Luzzatto to work on the material that was placed at his disposal by d'Abbadie, the results of which were published in instalments in the *Archives Israelites* from 1851 until his untimely death in 1854.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> D'Abbadie, *JC*, 24 October 1851, p.20.

<sup>100</sup> S. Cahen, the editor of *Archives Israelites* wrote, in a short obituary for Luzzatto, that he completed his final chapter in great pain and he was engrossed in research on the Falashas right up until the last days of his life. (*Archives Israelites*, volume 15, 1854, pp.653-54). Kessler asks "would the Falashas' fate, one wonders, have been different if he had lived?" (Kessler, *Falashas*, p.110).

Luzzatto was of the opinion that the Falashas' religious system reflected that which was in existence in Solomon's days.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, by understanding the culture and religion of these people, he thought it would be possible to compare them to other Jews, "of all sects and parties, for the purpose of learning which have preserved most intact the old Mosaic customs and traditions."<sup>102</sup> Luzzatto was convinced that with the replies of Abba Ishaq, together with the other information he had collected on the Falashas, he would be able to acquire a new proof "that the institutions of the modern Jews are very different from those of the ancient." Subsequently, one will be able to learn "what has been changed by time and place and what has not."<sup>103</sup> For example, Luzzatto considered the different dates of the fasts of the Falashas commemorating the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple illustrate "when confronted with the Bible ... that the those of all the Jews are incorrect and that the Falashas have alone conserved in its purity the tradition of these dates."<sup>104</sup> Therefore, according to Luzzatto, the Falashas play an important role in the understanding of the history of the development of Judaism.

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<sup>101</sup> Luzzatto believed the Falashas presented "a living and unique picture of the state of the Jews at the time of Solomon." (Luzzatto, *JC*, 31 October 1851, p.28).

<sup>102</sup> Luzzatto, *JC*, 31 October 1851, p.28.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 7 November 1851, p.34.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

I enumerate below several additional aspects of the Falashas' traditional life which Luzzatto brings to light in the *Archives Israelites*.

(I) The Falashas worship one God who is known as 'Lord of Creation.'

(II) The Falashas believe in angels who descend to earth on the Sabbath with God.

(III) The Falashas possess two calendars, a religious one which starts on the autumn equinox and a civil one which commences with the Autumn equinox. The former is a lunar calendar and is made up of twelve months whilst the civil calendar is solar and is identical to that of the Christians.

(IV) The Falashas observe the Sabbath with such rigidity that on this day they speak quietly, they do not light fires in their homes nor do they leave the house unless it is for natural needs or to go to the prayer house. What is more, the males do not see their wives from Friday evening until Sunday morning and all Falashas abstain from making food and drawing water on the Sabbath.

(V) On the first day of each month the Falashas sacrifice an animal.

(VI) The Falashas perform excision on females normally on the eighth day after her birth.<sup>105</sup>

Therefore, as we have seen, d'Abbadie's research on the Falashas (prompted and analysed by Luzzatto), contributed greatly to an understanding of the Falashas' traditional life. As a result of his analysis, it is possible to reconstruct a relatively accurate picture of their traditional way of life before they were affected by the elements of change. This analysis will be used as a model in later chapters to assess the degree of transformation that took place in Falasha society, as a result of external influences. To conclude this chapter, I will briefly summarise what foreign observers have revealed of the Falashas, prior to the mid-nineteenth century:

(I) Although the Falashas were considered by many foreign observers to be the Jews of Ethiopia,<sup>106</sup> their religion was seen to be very different from

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<sup>105</sup> Luzzatto quotes Bruce with regards to this practice. In volume 5, page 713, Bruce states that female circumcision was performed in Jerusalem in the time of Solomon and the Falashas continued this ritual when they left Palestine en route to Abyssinia. (*Archives Israelites*, volume 14, 1853, p.468).

<sup>106</sup> As Don Seeman writes, the claim that the missionaries were the first to "consistently treat the Beta Israel as 'Jews' in the universal sense of that term" (S. Kaplan and R. Westheimer, *Surviving Salvation*, (New York, 1992)) requires some modification. Although, they were the first to treat them as such in the context of prolonged daily contact, they were not the first to view them as Jews. The missionaries, Seeman proclaims, were more persistent than original. (D. Seeman, *Images of Continuity* (BA thesis), (Cambridge, Mass., 1990, p.24).

traditional Judaism. They were unfamiliar with Hebrew;<sup>107</sup> they did not possess oral traditions such as the Mishnah or Talmud, nor did they observe post-biblical practices such as the law of phylacteries or the festivals of Hanukkah<sup>108</sup> and Purim.<sup>109</sup> Although several of their festivals and fasts ostensibly bore a resemblance to those of traditional Judaism, their significance and customs varied quite considerably. The Falashas also observed numerous additional holy days and fast days.

(II) We have also been shown that their religion was quite similar to that of Ethiopian Christianity. Not only were their liturgy and religious books all in Ge'ez, the ancient religious language of their Christian neighbours, but the majority of the Falashas' religious books were derived from Christian versions. Likewise, many of their religious

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<sup>107</sup> There were, however, a few words used by the Falashas that were similar to Hebrew. These included the names of the months (Nesan, Ab, Tomos and perhaps Lul which is similar to the corresponding Jewish month of Elul). Other examples include several words which occur in the Falasha prayers, such as Adonay (Lord), gadol (great), ah@ya serah@ya (which is similar to the Hebrew expression Ehyeh asher Ehyeh- I am what I am), tora (Torah) and goyim (gentiles). (See Wolf Leslau, 'A Falasha Religious Dispute,' pp.89-94).

<sup>108</sup> D'Abbadie's questionnaire did report, however, that the Falashas acknowledge the books of Maccabees, although they did not observe the festival of Maccabees (Hanukkah).

<sup>109</sup> It is noteworthy to mention here that although the Falashas were ignorant of the festival of Purim, they did observe the 'Zoma Aster,' which would seem to correspond to the 'Fast of Esther' that falls the day before Purim.

practices were similar, such as circumcision and dietary laws, the origins of which are unknown.<sup>110</sup> However, we do know that the Falashas did borrow various Christian practices such as celibacy and monasticism.

(III) It would appear that at least up until the mid-nineteenth century, the Falashas believed they were the descendants of the Israelites who accompanied Menilek, the alleged son of King Solomon and Queen of Sheba, from Jerusalem to Ethiopia.<sup>111</sup> They, however, did not consider themselves as Jews.

(IV) In spite of the term's negative connotations today, the Falashas were commonly referred to as 'Falashas' by Ethiopian Christians and foreign observers.<sup>112</sup> The name, Beta Israel, did not appear in foreign observers' reports until the twentieth

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<sup>110</sup> As Quirin states, it is unsure if these practices originated from the Falashas and were subsequently passed on to the Christians or whether there have always been Hebraic influences in Ethiopia because of the Old Testament ambience of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. (Quirin, *Evolution*, p.7). Cf. Kessler, *The Falashas*, pp.xix-xx.

<sup>111</sup> The Ethiopian Christians also trace their origins to Menilek. This legend is documented in an account known as the 'Kebra Nagast' (the glory of Kings) which has become the Ethiopian national epic.

<sup>112</sup> As the 'Ethiopian Jews' were consistently referred to as 'Falashas' up until their arrival to Israel, I will be using the name 'Falashas' to refer to them throughout this thesis. For an analysis of the different names of the Falashas see C. Rosen, 'Falasha, Kayla, Beta Israel? Ethnographic Observations on the Names for the Jews of Ethiopia,' *Pe'amim*, vol. 22, 1985, pp. 53-58.

century, with the notable exception of those of James Bruce.<sup>113</sup>

(V) Foreign observers reported the Falashas to be on the periphery of Ethiopian society. This was a result of firstly, their desire to remain apart from the Christians, secondly, the Christians' belief that the Falashas possessed supernatural powers which stemmed from their particular occupations such as blacksmiths and thirdly, their exclusion from owning land.

(VI) It is possible to conclude from foreign observers' reports that a formal centralised communal body for all the Falasha villages did not exist. Rather, as Kaplan also asserts, "a large number of scattered communities existed with informal economic, political, marital and religious ties."<sup>114</sup>

The detailed reports of Bruce, Gobat and in particular, d'Abbadie, failed to arouse more than a superficial interest in the Falashas among the Jews of the West. One reason given for this apathy among Western Jewry was the fact that there were so many other exotic Jewish

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<sup>113</sup> Bruce explained the term 'Bet Israel' was used by Christians to refer to those who refused to convert to Christianity in the fourth century C.E. (Bruce, *Travels*, vol. 1, p.485).

<sup>114</sup> Kaplan, 'Leadership and Communal Organization,' p.157. He claims that while it may be convenient to speak of the "Beta Israel community," no evidence exists which suggests this to be the case.

communities throughout the world about whom little was known, that the Falashas were just one more such community.<sup>115</sup> Another reason suggested was that not until the mid-nineteenth century, with the emergence in Western and Central European Jewry of a 'modern' community, did Jews "[look] out beyond the ghetto walls."<sup>116</sup> Whatever the reason, it was only after the arrival of the missionaries that Western Jewry began to take an active interest in the Falashas which had, as we will examine, considerable repercussions in Falasha society.

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<sup>115</sup> T. Parfitt, *Operation Moses*, (New York, 1985), p.21. These included the Tats of Dagestan and Azerbaijan, the Cochin of Kerala and the Krimchaks of Crimea.

<sup>116</sup> J. Kaye, *On The Wings of Eagles*, MA Thesis, (Cincinnati, 1993), p.32.



## CHAPTER 2

### THE ERA OF THE MISSIONARIES<sup>1</sup>

There is a general consensus among most contemporary researchers of the Falashas that the establishment of a Protestant mission in Ethiopia in 1859 marked the beginning of the modern history of the Falashas. The arrival of missionaries, under the auspices of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, inaugurated the Falashas' encounter with Western modernity and Judaism which had, as we will see, a fundamental effect on their society.

Scholars such as Stephen Kaplan have cautioned against the temptation of placing the activities of the London Society in Ethiopia in the same category as those of the countless other missions established in Africa in the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> It is necessary, however, to consider the similar role that the Protestant mission to Ethiopia played in establishing permanent connections with indigenous societies, as these missionaries generally took precedence over other Europeans. Although Ethiopia is unique in Africa

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<sup>1</sup> For other accounts of this period in the history of the Falashas see: S. Kaplan, 'The Beta Israel (Falasha) Encounter With Protestant Missionaries: 1860-1915,' *Jewish Social Studies*, volume 49 (1), pp. 27-42; Kaplan, *Beta Israel*, pp.116-142; M. Eliav, 'The Awakening of West European Jewry to the Assistance of the Falashas,' *Tarbitz*, vol. 35, 1965, pp.61-76; Quirin, *Evolution*, pp.179-191 and Abbink, *Falashas in Ethiopia and Israel*, pp. 72-82.

<sup>2</sup> Kaplan, 'The Beta Israel Encounter,' p.27.

due to her prolonged isolation from the rest of the world, the Ethiopian mission played a significant role in the development of contemporary Ethiopia, which was also the case in other countries of Africa. In Ethiopia, as major representatives of the European presence, "they were highly influential in moulding Ethiopian attitudes towards the external world."<sup>3</sup> For those involved in the mission to Ethiopia, Christianity and civilisation were inseparable since acceptance of the former meant adoption of the latter. 'Civilisation' was in fact synonymous with Westernisation, a notion which enjoyed "a special vogue in mid-nineteenth century missiology."<sup>4</sup>

Former missionaries have declared that, in principle, the object of a mission is "to proclaim the message of salvation wherever providence opens a door for the spread of the knowledge of Him who is a light to the gentiles and to the salvation of God until the end of the earth."<sup>5</sup> It is clear though that "this primary purpose appears to have been purely and solely the moving force in the missions of apostolic and sub-apostolic times."<sup>6</sup> The mission to

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<sup>3</sup> D. Crummey, *Priests and Politicians: Protestant and Catholic Missions in Orthodox Ethiopia 1839-1868*, (Oxford, 1972), p.1.

<sup>4</sup> S. Jacobs, *Black Americans and The Missionary Movement in Africa*, (Connecticut, 1982), p.6.

<sup>5</sup> *Jewish Intelligence*, December 1884, p.303.

<sup>6</sup> C. Baeta, *Christianity in Tropical Africa*, (London, 1968), p.13. Although missionaries have striven to follow the spirit of general instruction issued by the Sacred Conference for Propagation of Faith in 1659 that stated "Do

Ethiopia also brought the first taste of modernity for the country as a whole, as well as for the Falashas.<sup>7</sup>

It is the purpose of this chapter to trace the history of the English Protestant mission to the Falashas and to examine its aims, methodology and results. Finally, I will analyse the impact that the missionary era had on Falasha society. As with the previous chapter, it will also be necessary to base the majority of this investigation on the reports of foreign observers due to the scarcity of indigenous records for this period. In this case, I will examine the reports which are found in the diaries of the missionaries and accounts submitted by them to the various journals of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews. These journals include *The Jewish Intelligence*, *The Jewish Missionary Intelligence*, *Annual Report* and *The Jewish Records*,<sup>8</sup> which not only provide a

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not regard it as your task and do not bring any pressure to bear on the peoples, to change their manners, customs and uses unless they are evidently contrary to religion and sound morals." (S. Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, (London, 1971), p.179) They did, as will be seen with Ethiopia, their "explicit contrary best " whether or not they have been aware of it. (K. Burridge, 'Missionaries and The Perception of Evil,' in V.H. Sutlive (ed.), *Missionaries, Anthropologists and Cultural Change*, (Virginia, 1985), p.154.

<sup>7</sup> Missionary journals report on several occasions that "Christianity wherever it is introduced carries with it the germ of civilisation, improvement and industry." (*Jewish Intelligence*, February 1, 1868, p.25).

<sup>8</sup> The abbreviations for these publications of the London Society will be JI (*Jewish Intelligence*), JMI (*Jewish Missionary Intelligence*), JR (*Jewish Record*), AR (*Annual Report*).

detailed account of the missionary work carried out in Ethiopia but also an account of the Falashas' religion, culture and history.

The foreign observers' reports in the form of mission material have to be used carefully and with considerable reservations. As Crummev states, "missionary enterprise itself implies preconceptions about the needs for changes and development and the forms they should take" since "missionaries had strong, although varying reservations about the quality of Ethiopian religious life."<sup>9</sup> Eric Payne, a missionary who worked among the Falashas from 1948-67, confirmed this view when he described these aforementioned journals as being "quite biased."<sup>10</sup> In

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<sup>9</sup> D. Crummev, 'Missionary Sources and Their Contributions to our Understanding of Ethiopian History,' *Rural Africana* (II), 1970, p.42.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Rev. Eric Payne, 10 March 1994. A helpful approach to the problem of bias inherent in missionary reports is to distinguish between bias and subjectivity. According to Shafer, bias is a judgement made without carefully examining the data and subjectivity, is not an ignoring of the facts, but simply the expression of personal values brought to bear on the situation. (R. Shafer, *A Guide To Historical Method*, (Homewood, 1969), p.149) Therefore, "bias in a document is quite different from the missionary's subjective interpretation being expressed" and thus in this investigation, instead of being unduly wary of missionary documents that "may be tainted with bias, it is far more important to attempt to understand the wholeness of a document, the context out of which it was created and the configurational whole of which it is a part. This includes, of course, understanding the bias that is implicit in the document and making it explicit." Therefore, "in coming to grips with the subjectivity expressed in a document one can gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence missionary-indigene interaction and subsequent cultural change." (D. Whiteman, 'Missionary Documents and Anthropological Research' in Sutlive (ed.), *Missionaries*, p.305).

short, it is noted that "there is a danger of competition even in holy things and that even missionaries and committees are mortal with tendencies to exaggerate results."<sup>11</sup> However, owing to a lack of an alternative, the periodicals of the London Society together with missionaries' journals and reports, will form the basis for the historical account of the mission to the Falashas of Ethiopia.

### The Creation of a Mission to Ethiopia

The commencement of a mission to Ethiopia was the culmination of several visits of Reverend Samuel Gobat of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) to the country beginning in 1826. Although, initially, Gobat did not specifically single out the Falashas for future missionary work (as his primary interest was in the Amharas), he found them to be more receptive to his preaching.<sup>12</sup>

The main purpose of the CMS, which was founded in 1799, was to revive the ancient Eastern churches of the Armenians, Nestorians, Copts and Ethiopians and to inspire them to take the Gospel to the neighbouring Muslims and Heathens.<sup>13</sup> The Ethiopian Church was indeed seen by many evangelical

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<sup>11</sup> A.L. Williams, *A Mission To The Jews*, (London, 1897), p. 53.

<sup>12</sup> S. Gobat, *Jl*, 1838, no.4, p.139.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Payne. See also E. Stock, *The History of the 'Church Missionary Society'*, (London, 1899), vol. 1, p.224.

Christian organisations as being in desperate need of "evangelization and regeneration."<sup>14</sup> It was described as being "surrounded with the utmost amount of superstition with which a Christian Church can be overlaid without perishing altogether."<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere, Ethiopian Orthodoxy was depicted as "a Christianity merely by courtesy ... a mongrel religion, which is not either Christianity, Judaism, Mohammedanism, or paganism. It is something of all of them" combining together "the least acceptable features of all of them, which it has stripped of all of their ethical contents."<sup>16</sup>

Christianity was the established religion of Ethiopia from the fourth century. None the less, Christian missionary organisations, such as the CMS, were of the opinion that "the light of other days has grown very dim and those conversant with the religious opinions and life of the Abyssinian Church and people aver that they are little more than a caricature of true Christian faith and practice."<sup>17</sup> Due to the many similarities between Ethiopian Christianity and Judaism, Gidney concluded that "the presence of Jews in the country [had] undoubtedly exercised great influence over its Christianity." "It may be averred," he declared,

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<sup>14</sup> W.T. Gidney, *Sites and Scenes: Description of The Oriental Missions of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Among The Jews*, (London, 1899), p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.9.

<sup>16</sup> *Jl*, July 1876, p.187.

<sup>17</sup> Gidney, *Sites and Scenes*, p.7.

"that the Christians more nearly follow the Jewish ritual than Jews in any part of the world."<sup>18</sup>

When Gobat was appointed Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem in 1846, "he continued to have the welfare of the Abyssinians at heart."<sup>19</sup> He also intended to pursue the C.M.S.'s endeavours by aiming to establish twelve new stations stretching from Jerusalem through Egypt and the Sudan to the highlands of Ethiopia. On learning that public security had improved in Ethiopia with the ascension of Emperor Tewodros II, Gobat "decided the time was ripe to make a new beginning in Ethiopia."<sup>20</sup>

With this in mind, Gobat sent two missionaries from Jerusalem to Abyssinia in 1855 to "ask the King of Abyssinia, Tewodros II, if he would allow some young men to establish schools in his country and preach and teach the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.9. Gidney discusses the major discrepancies between Ethiopian Christianity and mainstream Christianity namely:- "the denial of our Lord's humanity, purgatory, the intercession of saints, the adoration of the Virgin Mary, with disbelief in transubstantiation." Furthermore, he also recounted the similarities between Ethiopian Christianity and Judaism such as circumcision, adherence to the Levitical distinctions between clean and unclean animals, and observance of the Jewish Sabbath as well as the Christian Sunday.

<sup>19</sup> W.T. Gidney, *History of The London Society for Promoting Christianity Among The Jews From 1809-1908*, (London, 1908), p.368.

<sup>20</sup> E. Payne, *Ethiopian Jews: The Story of A Mission*, (London, 1972), p.30.

gospel."<sup>21</sup> One of these missionaries was J. Martin Flad who was to become the main missionary activist among the Falashas in Ethiopia. Like Gobat, Flad also did not commence his work in Ethiopia with the Falashas' conversion in mind. In the course of his preaching to both Amharas and Falashas,<sup>22</sup> after permission had been obtained from the Emperor, he became very familiar with the Falashas and had numerous discussions with them. The latter, Flad realised, were particularly accessible and showed great eagerness to possess the Bible, "our Father's Word," as they called it.<sup>23</sup>

In what would appear to be Flad's first recorded interview with a Falasha, he puts his case as follows-:

Flad: What hopes and promises have you?

Falasha: Our hope is in God's Law.

Flad: But do you know man cannot be saved by the Law.

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<sup>21</sup> *In Abyssinia-: A Land of Strange Contrasts*, Publication of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, no Date, p.9

<sup>22</sup> From 1856 to 1858, Flad and his colleagues were based in Gondar. There, they were engaged in visiting the people, establishing a boys' school and spreading the knowledge of "the true faith" by means of camel loads of Amharic Bibles, New Testaments and Psalms, to both Christians and Jews.

<sup>23</sup> J.M. Flad, *60 Years of Mission Work Among The Falashas in Abyssinia*, (original manuscript located in CMJ Archives, Bodleian library), p.43. Flad reserved the remainder of the Bibles exclusively for the use of the Falashas. Soon after he established a school in the Falasha village of Awora, which thirty boys attended. (JI, 1869, p.191).



Falasha: How so?

Flad: The Law condemns all who do not keep it strictly. God's word tells us we are sinners and that the just man falleth seven times a day. Our own experience shows us this - so we cannot be saved by the Law only.

Flad: How good it would be for you to believe in Jesus Christ by whose grace you may be justified and saved. Without believing in him, a man cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Falasha: You believe in Christ - well your country is good and you are Christians. But the Abyssinian Christians are bad - their monks are wicked and their worship is idolotary. They bow down to images which the Law forbids.

Flad: True, but you are not justified by this for rejecting Christ.

Falasha: In our book, there is nothing written about Christ.

Flad: David and Moses and the Prophets write about the Messiah whom God would send into the world by Him.

Falasha: I do not know this

(Flad: He now wanted to go but I detained him hoping to gain some information about this interesting remnant of God's people).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Conversation between Flad and a Falasha in 1856 recorded in working notes of C.H. Purday (Father-in-Law of H.A. Stern), for a lecture entitled 'Abyssinia, its King and Captives' held on 18 February 1868. (CMJ archives - Bodleian Library).

This discussion formed the basis for future missionary work among the Falashas as a similar structure and argument were often used by the missionaries. As a result of such dialogues, Flad realised the potential of the Falashas as a fertile "field for missionary work"<sup>25</sup> and indicated his impression to Gobat accordingly. He wrote that he found a more encouraging response among the Falashas than among the Amharas.<sup>26</sup> More importantly, Flad hoped that "this interesting people may be raised from their present degradation and perhaps even become a salt for the Abyssinian Church."<sup>27</sup>

At this early stage in the history of the mission to Ethiopia, another organisation became interested in the possibility of converting the Falashas. This was 'The London Society for Promoting Christianity Among The Jews,' an organisation which would henceforth dominate the missionary enterprise in Ethiopia. The Church's Ministry Among the Jews (CMJ), as it is known today, was established in 1809. According to Payne, its formation was "a result of some Christians being called by God and whose eyes were subsequently opened to realise that the people who had given to us our faith were the ones being most left out ...That then led to a greater study of the Old Testament

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<sup>25</sup> Flad, *Samuel Gobat, Bishop of Jerusalem, His Life and Work*, (London, 1884), p.334.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Payne.

<sup>27</sup> Flad, *60 years*, p.87.

scriptures and to a greater realisation of the prophecies contained in it, not only relating to Jesus as the Messiah but also pertaining to the future. That made us realise that the one reason why the Lord was delaying his return was because he wanted his own people to turn to him. The prophecies of Ezekiel and Jeremiah were a tremendous boost for the CMJ."<sup>28</sup>

### The Beginnings of a Mission to the Falashas

The London Society soon became one of the most popular of the missionary societies under the enthusiastic presidency of the Earl of Shaftesbury. It expanded its work from London to Palestine, as well as to most European and North African countries which had large Jewish populations. At its first Jubilee celebrations in 1859, "the society decided to use the extra funds given that year to take the gospel to Jews in unreached areas. To test whether it was the will of God for them to start a mission amongst the Falashas of Abyssinia,"<sup>29</sup> they sent out the German Jewish convert, Henry Aaron Stern, who was described as "the most courageous missionary on their staff"<sup>30</sup> to see:

(I) Were the Falashas Jews?

(II) Did he think it was right for the London Society to work amongst them and if so how?<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Payne.

<sup>29</sup> Payne, *Ethiopian Jews*, p.36.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Payne.

As a Jew by birth, Stern was deemed to be in a better position to judge the many characteristics and customs of the Falashas than other foreign observers. Notwithstanding his conversion to Christianity, some considered him to be "more sympathetic towards their conditions and more tolerant of their superstitions."<sup>32</sup> Stern's first object, on arriving in Ethiopia, was to obtain permission from the Emperor to work amongst the Falashas.

However, prior to meeting with Tewodros, he met a group of Falashas for the first time. Of this encounter in Chelga, he wrote that:

"those with whom we discussed were Falasha priests, a quiet, humble and inoffensive set of men, whose great error is, that they fancy they possess the truth, whilst alas! they know very little of the Book in which the wonderful saving truths are contained. The doctrines in which they repose all their faith and trust are almost entirely deduced from the Pentateuch, but so limited is their knowledge and so defective their acquaintance even with this small portion of God's holy word, that, beyond a few Mosaic rites, their whole system of religion seems to consist in abstaining from certain meats, in performing numerous

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<sup>32</sup> S. Mendelssohn, *The Jews of Africa*, (London, 1920), p.27.

lavations, and in offering expiatory sacrifices."<sup>33</sup>

To a question as to whether they believed in Jesus, the Falashas replied to Stern "Yes, He is the Messiah but not God," an answer which Stern felt needed clarification.

Stern found among the Falashas "an anxious desire for the word of God (both the Old Testaments and New Testaments) and an intense solicitude to fathom its sacred contents." He asserted that "the demand for bibles .... was so great and pressing."<sup>34</sup> Finally, he deduced that "the Falashas are far superior to their Christian neighbours in industry, honesty and purity of life: all they want is Gospel light and spiritual life, and if, by the blessing of God, we can communicate to them these Divine gifts, we may perhaps prepare the best agencies for emancipating this part of Africa from a thralldom and bondage far more grinding and grievous than ever the white man inflicted."<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, we again see that the intention of the London Society from the beginning of the mission was not only to convert the Falashas to Christianity but to use these converts to infiltrate and revive the Ethiopian Orthodox

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<sup>33</sup> *JII*, 1 November 1860, p.359.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.360.

church.<sup>36</sup> This would satisfy the ambitions of both the London Society and the CMS. It is thus no coincidence that there was a good deal of co-operation between the two organisations in Ethiopia.<sup>37</sup>

On meeting with Tewodros for the purpose of obtaining permission to commence missionary work amongst the Falashas, the Emperor initially avoided a direct answer and referred Stern instead to Abuna Salama, the spiritual head of the Abyssinian Church. It appears that Stern, who was not renowned for his tact, pushed the Emperor further in anticipation of receiving approval from the Abuna. As a result of his persistent pleas, Tewodros finally replied "I am your brother and friend and you have my full sanction to visit every place in my kingdom."<sup>38</sup>

The London Society described Tewodros, when he commenced his reign, as "a true Christian, acting up to his light" who "was fond of reading the bible and professed to make it his rule of life."<sup>39</sup> It would seem, however, that a

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<sup>36</sup> The missionaries planned to encourage the converted Falashas to form into "a nucleus for a future Reformed Church in the heart of Abyssinia." This was considered to be the "best leaven to move an idolatrous corrupt mass." (JI, 1 February 1968).

<sup>37</sup> See Payne, *Ethiopian Jews*, p.28.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> In *Abyssinia*, p.10. Indeed, in 1850, Tewodros was quoted as stating that "I have often taken trouble to convince the Falashas that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world but I have never succeeded. The Jews are hardened, and they are born enemies of

religious impetus was not the main motive behind the permission granted to Stern. A year later, Tewodros informed Stern of his desire "to have a good number of Europeans, particularly artisans, to instruct his people"<sup>40</sup> as they could provide the technical and vocational training that Tewodros knew would be useful for the development of the country.<sup>41</sup> Secondly, it is probable that Tewodros was suspicious of the missionaries' motives and feared that they would attempt to subvert Ethiopian Christianity. Tewodros may have consequently granted Stern authorisation to work amongst the Falashas in order to distance the Protestant missionaries from his Christian subjects, whilst still exploiting the missionaries' skills.

Abuna Salama also suspected that Stern "had made the mission to the Jews a pretence for interfering with the belief of the Christians."<sup>42</sup> Although "unqualified permission" was granted to Stern "to preach and hold assemblies in every village and town of his vast diocese" after he had convinced the Abuna that his "sole aim and desire was to bring the Falashas to the knowledge of Christ and the cross of the Redeemer;"<sup>43</sup> two important limitations

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Christ." (Flad, *60 years*, p.61).

<sup>40</sup> *JT*, 1 July 1861, p.183.

<sup>41</sup> H. Stern, *Wanderings Among The Falashas In Abyssinia*, (London, 1968), p.259.

<sup>42</sup> *JT*, 1 April 1861, p.89.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*.

were placed upon missionary activity the consequence of which became apparent as time progressed -:

(1) The missionaries were to operate only among non-Christian inhabitants of Ethiopia.

(2) All converts were to be baptised into the Orthodox Church on the understanding that they "should not be obliged to conform to the rules and rites of his [the Abuna's] own community, but that they should have toleration without schism."<sup>44</sup>

After official permission had been obtained, despite the unsatisfactory conditions imposed on the missionaries,<sup>45</sup> and Flad having joined Stern and his colleague Bronkhorst as guide and interpreter, the first official missionary party proceeded to Gondar. There, an exploratory missionary journey was undertaken amongst the Falashas. Following this expedition, Flad reported that "we found everywhere open hearts and ears for the Divine Truth which we set forth. In each village, men, women and children crowded around us and listened, often for hours, with the greatest attention ... It was a blessed thing for us to be able to satisfy the

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<sup>44</sup> Stern, *Wanderings*, p.301.

<sup>45</sup> The missionaries considered "native Christianity with its gross array of superstitions" as "a hindrance and stumbling block in the way of the Jews." (JR, July 1861, p.27). Stern expressed regret that converts must be given up to a lifeless and spiritless Church of Abyssinia (JI, 1 March 1863, p.67), a spiritual leader of which he had described as possessing a "self-conceited heart and empty brain." (Ibid).



spiritual hunger and thirst of our numerous visitors with the word of life and from the prophecies in the Old Testament to point them to Jesus Christ."<sup>46</sup> Stern also wrote that "my mission to the Falashas, or Jews of Abyssinia, was of the deepest interest ... During my stay in the country I visited ... upwards of 30 Falasha settlements ... The desire to obtain the word of God exceeds all descriptions."<sup>47</sup>

Following Stern's departure, Flad continued to work amongst the Falashas. Stern in fact persuaded him to join in the work of the London Society and left him in charge when he returned to England to report on his missionary work and write his book *Wanderings Among The Falashas in Abyssinia*. Bishop Gobat agreed to lend Flad to the London Society, and together with two other missionaries, he began to build a station at Jenda, about 14 miles north of Lake Tana. With the establishment of this first missionary station in Ethiopia, the mission to the Falashas can be seen to have officially commenced.

Having discussed the history of the establishment of missionary work in Ethiopia, I will now turn to an examination of the aims, methodology and impact of this mission to the Falashas which continued for more than a century in Ethiopia and to some extent, is still operative

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<sup>46</sup> Flad, '12 Years in Abyssinia,' *JII*, 1869, p.218.

<sup>47</sup> *JII*, 1 April 1861, p.90.

today in Israel amongst the Falashas.<sup>48</sup>

### Aims of the Mission

It is evident from the introduction that the mission to the Falashas was a by-product of an attempt to strengthen the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. As a result of a more receptive audience among the Falashas and due to the restrictions placed on the missionaries, the mission to Ethiopia officially became a mission to the Falashas of Ethiopia. It is my opinion that the second restriction was probably welcomed by the missionaries despite their repeated regrets. They hoped that the converts who would enter the Church would indeed, as the Abuna and Tewodros feared, foster renewal within indigenous Christianity.<sup>49</sup> This endeavour can be seen as a reversal in order of the aims of the CMS and an extension of those of the London Society.

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<sup>48</sup> See C. Rosen, 'The Beta Israel and their Missionary Nemesis' and D. Seeman, 'All in the Family: Kinship as a Paradigm for the Study of Ethiopian Jews, Pentecostals and Feres Mura' in D. Appleyard, T. Parfitt, E. Trevisan Semi, (eds.), *Proceedings of the Second International Congress of the Society for the Study of Ethiopian Jewry*, (Jerusalem, 1995), (forthcoming). Payne also indicated in an interview that missionary work was carried out amongst the Falashas in Israel, albeit unofficially.

<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Stern stated on more than one occasion that although "it would afford far greater satisfaction, if we could establish independent churches of Falasha believers," he believed "that a nominal unity of our converts, without a virtual conformity to the Abyssinian Church, which the Archbishop told me, when in the country, was all he required, may, by the blessing of our God, prove the very means of effecting that reformation, which all extraneous attempts have hitherto failed to achieve." (*JII*, April 1 1963, p.92).

However, for obvious reasons, the official aim of the Protestants' mission in Ethiopia had to be seen by the Abuna and the Emperor as entirely dedicated to the conversion of the Jews. Although there were numerous hints of a desire for the regeneration of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church among the missionaries, it was definitely not official London Society policy.

Accordingly, it is of no surprise that a document in the CMJ archives states that "the object of the mission in Ethiopia is to present the true gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Falasha peoples and to seek their spiritual welfare. This is the primary objective."<sup>50</sup> In addition, Stern, on his return to Ethiopia in 1863, wrote of a conversation he had had with a Falasha. He professed that the missionaries "had not come to teach the doctrines of any particular Church, but to proclaim Jesus as the only saviour of sinners and if they were convinced and embraced the truth, it mattered very little to us where they were baptised, so long as they had the Holy Spirit - the seal of their 'conversion' and the title to all the promises of the Gospel."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Anon. 'The object of our mission,' no date, CMJ Archives, Bodleian Library.

<sup>51</sup> *JII*, 1 May 1864, p.107. Prior to his departure, Stern also wrote that "our sole and only object was the salvation of their souls and whether they accepted the Divine message of mercy or continued in their unbelief, they might rest assured that our motives were pure and our love to them disinterested." (*JII*, 1 July 1961, p.189).

From the onset of the mission, an emphasis was placed on gaining converts who were genuine and not converting for the sake of the anticipated material benefits received on joining the "Fellowship of Christ."<sup>52</sup> In a document in the CMJ archives pertaining to the objectives of the mission, the anonymous author stated that "it will be noted at once that ... no mention is made of the material welfare of the Falashas." He further declared that the reason for this was that "their material welfare is not our primary objective" as "it is a scriptural principle that sometimes the soul is helped to develop and strengthened by material adversity and scripture as well as history shows that cushioning people by gaining privileges to those who profess Christ, can and often does ruin their souls." Thus, "we wish to show no favouritism and not hold out material gain as a carrot to professing Christ."<sup>53</sup>

Dr. Krapf, who accompanied Flad to Ethiopia in 1855, also asserted that "assistance from the mission ... should be given only in occasional and extreme cases, never as a means of obtaining proselytes who are such merely by profession." He continued by commenting that "Evangelical missions found their success upon the inward life, not on the outward profession ... they have no need to buy

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<sup>52</sup> Anon. 'Rules of the Fellowship of Christ,' no date, CMJ Archives, Bodleian Library.

<sup>53</sup> Anon. 'The object of our mission,' no date, CMJ Archives, Bodleian Library.

proselytes."<sup>54</sup>

It is thus evident that the missionaries were opposed to forced and false conversions as they were considered to be incapable of producing the desired result of obtaining genuine converts.<sup>55</sup> To be a genuine convert or "convert of the heart" was a necessary precondition for baptism. It was stated by the missionaries that "baptism alone would be of no avail without change of heart"<sup>56</sup> and thus the missionaries strove to educate the Falashas before considering them eligible or not to enter the fold of Christianity.<sup>57</sup> Most missionaries were of the opinion that "if the Falashas are wishful of being baptised only without being converted, it is better that they remain Falashas."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> L. Krapf, Preface to J. M. Flad, *The Falashas (Jews) of Abyssinia*, (London, 1869), p.xii.

<sup>55</sup> On numerous occasions, the missionaries stated that they "would not, and dared not ... use violence towards any of His majesty's subjects" in order to win converts. What is more, "even if all the Jews were ready and willing to receive baptism" the missionaries would not administer it to a single individual "without previous instruction, and unmistakable evidences of conviction and conversion." (*Jl*, July 1, 1861, p.176). Also, see for example, account of the missionaries' (apparently successful) attempt to prevent Emperor Yohannis's aspirations to convert Falashas by decree. (*Jl*, July 1880, p.185).

<sup>56</sup> *Jl*, July 1889, p.104 and *AR*, 1892, p.147.

<sup>57</sup> The same is true for the mission to the Jews as a whole, since missionaries believe that "to make baptisms the be-all and end-all of ... missions is to place them in an utterly wrong position. If there is to be, as St Paul seems certainly to say, a time in the future when the Jews will return to Christ, then the supreme object of missions must be to prepare them for that time and to do ones best to hasten it." (Williams, *Missions*, pp. 61-62).

<sup>58</sup> *Jl*, February 1881, p.7.

It should also be mentioned here that the missionaries, throughout the campaign in Ethiopia, placed considerable emphasis on converting entire family groups rather than single individual members of a family. The reason for this, according to Payne, was firstly to prevent harassment by members of a particular family who were opposed to a relative's conversion and secondly, due to the fact that the New Testament advocates conversion of this sort.<sup>59</sup>

Having discussed the aims of the London Society's mission to Ethiopia, I will now turn to an analysis of the methodology the missionaries applied in an attempt to realise the set goals. These aims can be summarised as follows:

- (1) To achieve genuine converts among the Falashas, whose sole incentive in converting was a realisation of the truth,<sup>60</sup> namely to believe in Jesus Christ as

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with Payne.

<sup>60</sup> According to the CMJ's covenant for potential converts, a true believer would have to believe in the following principles-:

- (1) To believe in Jesus Christ as Saviour, Lord and God.
  - (2) To believe in the whole Bible as the word of God, and that every Christian doctrine must be based on it and to endeavour, with the family, to read it and pray every day.
  - (3) To try and win others to Christ.
  - (4) To believe that it is more blessed to give than to receive.
  - (5) A understanding that the chief privilege of converting is the spiritual strength and happiness that comes from unity and love in Christ through studying his word together and worshipping and witnessing together for him.
- ('Rules of the Fellowship of Christ,' no date, CMJ Archives, Bodleian Library).

the saviour.

(2) To use these converts as a foundation to reform and strengthen the Ethiopian Orthodox Church from within.

### Methodology

In the previous chapter, numerous differences between the Falashas' religious observances and traditions and those of traditional Judaism were highlighted - the most significant of these differences being the Falashas' ignorance of the Oral Law and their observance of practices such as monasticism and sacrifice. It was mainly due to factors such as these that the mission to the Falashas was unique amongst other missions to Jews. Although the Falashas did not possess the Talmud, which was a frequent source of missionary attack, and based their faith directly on the Old Testament,<sup>61</sup> their unique observances became objects of criticism together with their non-acceptance of Christ. The mission to the Falashas therefore required a different approach than that used elsewhere in the world.

From the onset of the mission, the missionaries proceeded on the basis that most Falashas were ignorant. This was based on the premise that "they had no intelligent knowledge of scriptures"<sup>62</sup> and thus relied on the knowledge

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<sup>61</sup> According to Rev. Payne, this made the Falashas "far more pure in their Jewish belief." (Interview)

<sup>62</sup> *JT*, 1 April 1861, p.92.

of their religious leaders. Subsequently, much of the mission work among the Falashas involved exploiting their supposed ignorance and undermining their religious leaders' authority. The missionaries used their knowledge of the bible (especially the Old Testament) and skill as debaters to try and 'prove' to the Falashas that their religion was spiritually empty. The Falashas were constantly criticised for believing that "a strict observance of Mosaic ritual and instruction were if united with penance and infliction of voluntary sufferings quite sufficient to atone for sins and to gain favour of God."<sup>63</sup> These ceremonies, they were told, only affected the body but left "unchanged and unconverted the corrupt and sinful heart."<sup>64</sup> Therefore, to trust in a few "empty superstitions which only torment the guilty conscience,"<sup>65</sup> would in the missionaries' opinion, only result in "time and not eternity, temporal and not spiritual promises as a reward."<sup>66</sup>

Stern and his colleagues introduced themselves as Falashas<sup>67</sup> who believed in "every word contained in the Law delivered to Moses on Sinai."<sup>68</sup> The missionaries informed the Falashas they encountered that they had come to

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<sup>63</sup> *JT*, 1 July 1861, p.192.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.190.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.197.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.193.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.198 & *JT*, 1 April 1861.

<sup>68</sup> *JT*, 1 July 1861, p.200.



Abyssinia "moved by compassion for their hopeless and deplorable condition ... to communicate to them those tidings of mercy which alone can secure peace to the troubled conscience and fill the soul with love to a sin-hating God."<sup>69</sup> These "tidings of mercy" would involve a demonstration with "textual proof" from the Bible that firstly, Jesus Christ was the Messiah and secondly, faith in him would exempt the Falashas from observing the "mysterious rites and sacrificial emblems."<sup>70</sup>

Evangelical Christians believe there are numerous passages in the Old Testament which can be interpreted to show that Jesus fulfilled many of the prophecies pertaining to the Messiah.<sup>71</sup> These include Isaiah 53, Psalm 32 and Deuteronomy 18, which were also the favourite texts used by the missionaries in their work amongst the Falashas. They endeavoured to trace through these lines of prophecy "the character of Jesus who was to make atonement for sin and bring fallen and ruined man back to the forfeited favour of God."<sup>72</sup> By turning to Jesus, the Falashas were informed they would receive heavenly inheritance.

The Falashas would also have to realise that rituals such as sacrifice were no longer necessary. According to the

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.174.

<sup>70</sup> *JII*, 1 April 1861, p.91.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Payne.

<sup>72</sup> *JII*, 1 May 1864, p.104.

missionaries, "Christ was the only all sufficient sacrifice for sins and that the sacrifices of the Old Testament were but the foreshadowing of him who made his soul an offering for sin and brought in an everlasting righteousness - that the ceremonies which they practised were of no avail in the sight of God."<sup>73</sup> In addition, the missionaries argued that according to Deuteronomy 12:14, sacrifices may only be offered in one place, namely, the temple of Jerusalem. Since the temple, they declared, had been destroyed and "Christ offered for our sins, the bloody sacrifices have ceased and they are an abomination before God."<sup>74</sup>

The missionaries frequently attempted to publicly humiliate those individual Falashas who possessed a rudimentary knowledge of the Old Testament. They felt controversies of this kind (see dialogue below) were "often very useful" as they "[kept] up attention among those who cannot read" which included the overwhelming majority of the Falashas-:

"When he [a Falasha] had asserted that the Lord had given the law in Egypt, and I had corrected his errors, he exclaimed impatiently, "Yes and this Law we keep and no other will we hear."

Flad: What was the law that the Lord gave to the children of Israel on Mount Sinai?

"The ten words," he replied quickly, looking around

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<sup>73</sup> *JII*, July 1889, p.106.

<sup>74</sup> *JMI*, Jan. 1901, p.9.

victoriously on the assembly.

Flad:Do you know them?

Again he blundered.

When I had repeated them aloud, in order that all should hear it, I asked, "Now tell me is there anything said in these ten words about washing, about the separation rules, about abstaining from defiled things, which you just before affirmed was the religion of the children of Israel? This perplexed him greatly."<sup>75</sup>

According to the missionaries' reports, the lay Falashas would frequently refer the missionaries to their religious leaders, the priests and monks, whom the Falashas looked to for all religious matters. On hearing their message, it was common for the missionaries to be informed by the Falashas that although they had been "told [a] great many things" that they did not know before, "if you convince our Kahen (priest) that Jesus is the son of God, and the promised messiah, [we] will believe in him."<sup>76</sup> "We ignorant people cannot make out on which side truth is."<sup>77</sup>

Consequently, the missionaries next task was to exploit the ignorance of the monks and priests in an attempt to undermine the Falashas' religious leadership, a process

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<sup>75</sup> JR, April & May 1863, p.17.

<sup>76</sup> JI, April 1898, p.53.

<sup>77</sup> JMI, Aug. 1906, p.118.

they viewed as the key to the Falashas' conversion.<sup>78</sup> Accordingly, the missionaries utilised every opportunity to debate with the clergy, demonstrating their excellent knowledge of the scriptures and skill at debating.<sup>79</sup> The Falashas' religious leaders, none of whom apparently possessed a complete bible, were generally unequipped to counter attack the missionaries' religious onslaught.

Frequently the missionaries would criticise the Falashas' religion by blaming the 'corrupt interpretation' of the Old Testament on the priests and monks. Many occasions arose when the missionaries would directly accuse the religious leadership, who "pretended to keep the Law," of being "great transgressors of the same" since they had added to it "in direct contradiction to Moses's command."<sup>80</sup> What is more, they did not observe commandments of the Old Testament such as the law of "the blue fringes on the borders of the garments," or those regarding the tabernacle, altar and "priests of the son of Aaron."<sup>81</sup> The missionaries subsequently informed the Falasha clergy that they were now under God's curse since "Moses pronounced a curse against all who do not fulfil all the words of the

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<sup>78</sup> A similar tactic was used by Jewish visitors to Ethiopia in the twentieth century.

<sup>79</sup> This contradicts Stern's original statement in which he declared that "the missionaries had not come to exhibit our skill in argument - nor to perplex them." (*Jl*, 1 July 1861, p.189).

<sup>80</sup> *JR*, Jan. 1862, p.3.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*.

Law."<sup>82</sup>

The same accusation concerning the transgression of the Falashas' religious leadership was also directed to the Falasha laity. They were often informed by the missionaries that "the Falasha priesthood transgressed the very Law in which they confided, and manifested the depravity and corruption of their hearts by the torture and agony they themselves inflicted."<sup>83</sup> They also advised the Falashas that their religious leadership was "unfortunately more guided by custom and traditional usages than by the revealed word of God and that arose their numerous legends and fables, superstitions and soul-destroying errors."<sup>84</sup>

It would be reasonable to assume that all the missionary work in Ethiopia was carried out by Protestant missionaries despatched from Europe. However, during most of the London Society's years in Ethiopia, the work was actually carried out by so-called 'native agents' or Falasha converts. This case "presents the rare and probably unique instance of a mission carried on through a long and difficult period of 57 years by native agents **only**."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> *JT*, 1 July 1861, p.192.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.198.

<sup>85</sup> C.W. Flad, *Abyssinia - A Romance of Missions*, (London, n.d.), publication of the CMJ, p.27.

The situation arose out of a diplomatic incident in October 1863, which resulted in Stern and his colleagues being imprisoned by Emperor Tewodros II. After being freed by a British expeditionary force in April 1868, the missionaries all returned to Europe, never to return to Ethiopia.<sup>86</sup> The only missionary who resumed work with the Falashas was Flad who, although he was refused permission to return to live in Ethiopia, gave crucial support for the continuation of the mission.<sup>87</sup> He accomplished this by meeting regularly with the native missionaries on the borders of Ethiopia in order to educate them in missionary instruction and to give them much needed books, money and moral support.

The principle convert who became the leader and inspiration of the 'native-agents' from the time of his conversion in the early 1860's to his death in 1890 was Debtera Beroo. He is described in CMJ literature as the 'Apostle of the Falashas'<sup>88</sup> and on his baptism was given the additional names of 'Wolda Paulus' as "truly he was a follower of St.

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<sup>86</sup> This expulsion was expected by Stern as he wrote prior to his imprisonment: "we have stirred up a spirit of inquiry among Jews and Amharas, which must either terminate in a spontaneous reform, or lead (which is far more probable) to our expulsion and a relentless persecution." (JI, 1 November 1863, p.275).

<sup>87</sup> Although Flad remained the head of the mission to the Falashas until his death in 1915 and entitled his autobiography *60 Jahre in der Mission unter den Falachas in Abessinien*, most of this period was served outside Ethiopia.

<sup>88</sup> *Paulus Wolde Beru, the Apostle of the Falascha*, document deposited in the archives of the CMJ, Bodleian Library.

Paul."<sup>89</sup> He, together with the other major 'native agents' such as Michael Argawi and Hiob Negoosie, eventually formed the basis of the mission to the Falashas, continuing with their predecessors' objectives and methods.<sup>90</sup> This group of Falasha converts were clearly not affiliated to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. For this reason, they became known as "English Protestants"<sup>91</sup> and later, "Yato Flad-Lessotch" or Mr. Flad's children.<sup>92</sup>

This situation in Ethiopia, where the mission to the Falashas was organised by 'native agents,' was not unusual in comparison with other missions of the London Society around the world. In countries where this organisation was operative, Jewish converts were also employed by the mission to carry out missionary work and it should be recalled here that Henry Stern, himself, was a Jewish convert. Although the circumstances in Ethiopia were different compared to the rest of the London Society's bases, (as they had no alternative but to use these 'native missionaries'), they were generally preferred by the CMJ as a useful medium for spreading the message of the Gospel to their brethren. As a convert from Judaism would always

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<sup>89</sup> *Memoir of Debtera Beru of Abyssinia*, (publication of the CMJ), (London, 1909), p.14.

<sup>90</sup> In many of the 'native agents' reports, their objectives appear to be identical to those of the original missionaries such as achieving general converts etc. The methodology, as will be seen, also remained the same.

<sup>91</sup> *JR*, May 1871, p.19.

<sup>92</sup> *AR*, 1885, p.125

remain Jewish, it was assumed their Jewish co-religionists would be more prepared to listen to him than if he were a Christian.<sup>93</sup>

The same is true for the Falashas since the London Society used the 'native agents' in order to gain access to their unconverted brethren. They were able to take advantage of the fact that the former possessed an intimate knowledge of the Falashas and moreover, were still affiliated to them, having only undergone a nominal baptism into the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. On numerous occasions, the 'native missionaries' introduced themselves to the Falashas as co-religionists who had 'seen the light' and now wished to convey the 'true message' to them.

Although the majority of the "native-agents" had not undergone any formal training,<sup>94</sup> Flad considered them "well adapted for evangelistic work in Eastern Africa" as, in his words, "ardour, devotion and holy ambition, they evidently do not lack."<sup>95</sup> The main 'native agents' possessed a fair

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<sup>93</sup> Many so-called 'Hebrew Christians' proclaim themselves "not only to have remained Jewish after their conversion to Christianity but in fact to have enhanced and improved their 'Jewishness' as a result of their conversion." (B. Sobel, *Hebrew Christianity - The Thirteenth Tribe*, (New York, 1974), p.2).

<sup>94</sup> *JT*, November 1899, p.163. The exception being the handful of Falasha converts who were trained at St. Chrischona, a seminary for the training of pilgrim missionaries in Switzerland and subsequently returned to work amongst the Falashas as 'native agents.'

<sup>95</sup> *JT*, December 1884, p.306.



knowledge of the scriptures, having been instructed by Flad. To his surprise and joy, they never hesitated in presenting their new knowledge to their unconverted brethren, by quoting extensively from the bible in their debates with the Falashas.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, Flad writes of Deberta Beroo that "I must confess that I never thought before, that a convert of the Falashas could give such a clear and impressive explanation of the fundamental doctrines of our holy faith as I heard that day. He quoted passages from the Old and New Testament, as if his memory was a Concordance."<sup>97</sup>

Having discussed the missionary agents and their message, it is now appropriate to discuss the main framework implemented in order to recruit potential converts, namely:- distribution of religious literature and more importantly, education.<sup>98</sup>

As was noted previously, Flad and his colleagues in their pilot mission from 1856 to 1858 established a boys' school

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<sup>96</sup> See for example *JT*, November 1899.

<sup>97</sup> *JT*, 1871, p.158.

<sup>98</sup> It is debatable whether education and distribution of literature could be considered a form of inducement which was supposedly shunned as an attraction for ungentine converts. There were indeed many cases when Falashas joined a missionary school or accepted literature for reasons not conforming to the aims of the mission but to take advantage of these hitherto unavailable facilities. (See R. Pankhurst, 'The Foundations of Education, Printing, Newspapers, Book Production, Libraries and Literacy in Ethiopia,' *Ethiopian Observer*, 6, 1962, pp.241-290).

and distributed many Bibles, New Testaments and psalms in Amharic. When the mission was put into the hands of the 'native agents,' the same methods were employed. Missionary work was not restricted to religious attacks but also included conventional educational methods.<sup>99</sup> Using the literature provided by Flad, the 'native agents' (like their predecessors) proceeded from village to village<sup>100</sup> and would distribute it to those Falashas who expressed an interest in their preaching. For the first time many obtained "the Word of God in their own language, it hitherto being only in Ge'ez and hence unintelligible to all except the priest or debtera."<sup>101</sup> It was also common for the passages in the Old Testament that had been interpreted as referring to Jesus as the messiah, to have been given particular emphasis. After the 'native agents' had given an explanation of their message, the potential convert was left alone to study the relevant passages, to be visited at a later date when their suitability for

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<sup>99</sup> These methods, they hoped, would satisfy the main objective of the mission ie. to seek the spiritual welfare of the Falashas and not necessarily their material welfare. In a CMJ document, it is written that "anything we do for them should be with a view to helping them as a whole people and not necessarily what they think they need." ('The Object of our Mission,' CMJ Archives, Bodleian Library).

<sup>100</sup> From 1875, the work was conducted from three base stations: Jenda, Asseso and Dagusa by eight native assistants and four teachers, all, with the exception of one, Falasha converts. (Gidney, *History of The London Society*, p.476).

<sup>101</sup> Pankhurst, 'The Foundations,' p.247.

conversion would be assessed.<sup>102</sup>

There was, however, a major obstacle that the missionaries had to overcome before they could expect their message to make an impact, namely the Falashas' high rate of illiteracy. Stern, after his exploratory mission, reported that at two villages, there was no-one who could read or write and at a third, there was no-one who could read fluently.<sup>103</sup> Although, the Falashas did have some form of educational establishment for children,<sup>104</sup> the vast majority remained uneducated.<sup>105</sup> This situation was unacceptable for the missionaries and their 'native agents'

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<sup>102</sup> Kaplan notes, with regards to the mission to Africa as a whole, that "the discovery of the right terms for basic biblical concepts was one of the most serious difficulties facing evangelists in the field" as "misunderstanding or improper attention to nuance could frequently result in the total misrepresentation in the message they attempted to convey." Thus, the 'native agents' in Ethiopia who had "a firm grounding in both the language and the culture of the people" possessed the necessary requirements "in order to accurately express Christian ideas" to their brethren. (S. Kaplan, 'The Africanization of Missionary Christianity: History and Typology,' *Journal of Religion in Africa*, volume 26, (3), 1986, p.171). It is thus not surprising to learn that Flad also used Michael Argawi, one of his 'native-agents,' to assist in the translation of the New Testament into Amharic. (*In Abyssinia*, p.29).

<sup>103</sup> *Jl*, 1 July 1861, pp.192-196.

<sup>104</sup> Indeed, Stern met a debtera who ran a school with 94 children and Flad was informed that there were schools for boys (but not girls). (*Flad, Abyssinia*).

<sup>105</sup> According to Stern, the only Falashas who "were obliged to undertake the onerous task of acquiring a knowledge of the Amharic and if they were a little more ambitious, of the sacred Ethiopic" were those who devoted themselves to the service of worship. (*Jl*, 1 November 1863, p.276).

as those who were unable to read "[were] the most difficult to reach"<sup>106</sup> as they remained under the control of the Falasha priests.<sup>107</sup>

The establishment of schools thus constituted another important branch of the missionaries' attempts to break down "a great barrier to the search after truth."<sup>108</sup> The missionaries' chief objective at these schools was, according to Stern, to teach them to read and write their own language.<sup>109</sup> In other accounts, it was noted that the Gospel was also taught at the schools.<sup>110</sup> Whatever the official motive, the schools in Ethiopia were considered by the missionaries to be a very important factor in the drive to achieve genuine converts.<sup>111</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that whenever and wherever possible, both the 'native missionaries' and their

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<sup>106</sup> *JMI*, Jan. 1900, p.11.

<sup>107</sup> *JMI*, Jan. 1901, p.10.

<sup>108</sup> *JJ*, 1 November 1863, p.277. The establishment of schools was a common task of the London Society, wherever it was located. (See Y. Ben Arie, *Jerusalem in The Nineteenth Century*, (New York, 1984), pp. 335-36).

<sup>109</sup> *JJ*, 1 November 1863, p.277.

<sup>110</sup> See for example *JR*, April & May 1863, p.15. Also revealed in the interview with Payne.

<sup>111</sup> Bahru Zewde claims that "the first educated Ethiopians were mostly sponsored by missionaries. The most prominent of these were Professor Tamrat Amanuel of Gondar, one of the many Falasha who had benefited from their close association with the missionaries." (Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, (London, Athens, Addis Ababa, 1991), p.104 - highlight is mine).

predecessors would preach to the Christians and distribute literature to them. Despite the official ban, the missionaries would exploit every possible opportunity in an attempt to directly accomplish the original goal they had set out to achieve - the regeneration of Ethiopian Christianity. The numerous encounters between missionaries and Christians described in the journals indicate that preaching normally took place at the same time and place as that directed to the Falashas,<sup>112</sup> as the missionary's audience was normally a combination of both Falashas and Christians.<sup>113</sup> Although direct preaching to the Christians was evidently a significant element in the London Society's campaign in Ethiopia, it is not the purpose of this investigation to analyse the effect of the mission on the Christians. The object is to examine the impact of the mission on the Falashas' society and it is to this analysis I will now turn.

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<sup>112</sup> The native missionary, Argawi, stated in one of his reports that "he was thankful that he had the opportunity to preach Christ to a large number of Native Christians." (JI, July 1905).

<sup>113</sup> The policy of direct preaching to the Christians, in conjunction with the Falashas, was already in operation at the commencement of the mission. In Stern's account of his exploratory mission, he writes "we read to them [the Falashas] a part of the eighteenth chapter, and then as several Christian priests and the Governor of the place were present, we told them their teachers like those of the Christians, were unfortunately more guided by custom and traditional usages, than by the revealed Word of God." (JI, 1 July 1861, p.198).

### The Impact of the Missionary Era on Falasha Society.<sup>114</sup>

According to missionary records, the number of Falashas who were baptised by the mission was never large. As Kaplan also observes,<sup>115</sup> a mere 65 conversions were claimed by 1868, 1470 by 1894<sup>116</sup> and 1513 by 1908.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, it is evident that rarely did the number converted in a single year exceed forty Falashas.<sup>118</sup> Missionaries tried to defend these ostensibly poor results by claiming that indirect results should also be considered in order to gain an

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<sup>114</sup> Due to a lack of material which throws light on the reaction of the Falashas to the missionaries, it is necessary to rely on the journals of the missionaries. As they are not able to give us an objective portrayal, only the processes which are known to have commenced during this period and continued throughout the twentieth century will be discussed.

<sup>115</sup> Kaplan, *Beta Israel*, p.128.

<sup>116</sup> *Jl*, June 1894, p.85.

<sup>117</sup> Gidney, *History*, p.616. Payne in *Ethiopian Jews*, p. 68, quotes a figure of 1600 conversions by 1909. It should be noted here that converts and potential converts did not come from all locations and divisions of Falasha society; there were in fact geographical and age factors involved. Firstly, the young were seen and indeed, proved to be particularly susceptible to the mission's message. Secondly, the small number of the mission's schools mainly attracted Falashas from the vicinity. The Falasha villages located far from the mission's influence were generally unaffected. As we will see, these same factors also influenced the outcome of the Jewish mission to the Falashas.

<sup>118</sup> Kaplan asserts that there are several factors to be taken into account when dealing with the number of Falasha converts. Firstly, the population of the Falashas during the first decades of the mission's presence in Ethiopia was uncertain which hampers our analysis of the proportional impact of the mission. Secondly, the numbers listed in the missionary journals refer to those Falashas who were baptised by the mission, not those who entered directly into the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Thirdly, the figures quoted must be viewed with suspicion with regards to their accuracy. (Kaplan, *Beta Israel*, p.127).

accurate depiction of the mission's impact.<sup>119</sup> Although it is tempting to minimise the overall impact of the mission on the Falashas given the relatively few Falashas who converted to Christianity, this, according to Kaplan, would be "a serious error." The mission, followed by the Great Famine<sup>120</sup> of 1888-1892, also had an impact on those who rejected Christianity for they "underwent transformations no less dramatic than those who converted."<sup>121</sup> For this reason, the impact of the mission on Falasha society can be said to have been more "qualitative than quantitative."<sup>122</sup> Clearly, the mission set processes in motion that would have a significant impact on Falasha society.

#### The Decline of Monasticism

The missionaries most of all wanted to undermine the Falashas' religious leadership and the institution of monasticism. The missionaries were in fact confident that this was occurring during the course of their preaching.

Respecting the Jews, or Falashas, one remarkable

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<sup>119</sup> T.D. Halstead, *Our Missions: Being a History of the Principle Missionary Transactions of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews*, (London, 1866), p.364.

<sup>120</sup> For an account of the Kifu-gen see Kaplan, *The Beta Israel*, pp.143-154; R. Pankhurst, 'The Great Famine of 1888-1892' in *The History of Famine and Epidemics in Ethiopia Prior to the Twentieth Century*, (Addis Ababa, 1985).

<sup>121</sup> Kaplan, *The Beta Israel*, p.129.

<sup>122</sup> Quirin, *Evolution*, p.182.

feature is at present observable, namely, that they have been greatly divided in their religious opinions, as also in respect of their adherence to the monks ... They feel our superiority over their teachers, they perceive our acquaintance with the work of God; and comparing it with the ignorance of those teachers, they are astonished ... Hence a great division has arisen, and although we must not as yet be too sanguine, yet we may freely say that the balance is in our favour.<sup>123</sup>

It would seem that the missionaries had commenced a process that would seriously undermine the Falasha monks' authority during the latter half of the nineteenth century. With their more extensive knowledge of the scriptures, the 'native-agents' highlighted the Clergy's unfamiliarity with many Biblical texts and also with Old Testament Judaism.<sup>124</sup> Many young Falashas in areas of missionary activity became disillusioned with their religious leaders and some turned to the Mission as an alternative.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> JR, January 1862, p.2.

<sup>124</sup> Flad wrote that the Falashas "felt our superiority to their own teachers; and our knowledge, in comparison with their ignorance" which "excited the peoples' astonishment." "The Falashas soon began to openly accuse the monks of keeping them in the darkness, and to maintain, that the true light of God's Word was set forth by us." (JI, 1 October 1869, pp.243-244).

<sup>125</sup> As I mentioned earlier, a religious motive may not have been behind the attraction of the mission for many. Education and copies of hitherto unavailable printed texts undoubtedly encouraged many potential converts.



With the Kifu-gen (the Great Famine) of 1888-1892, the already weakened monastic institution went into further decline as a result of two factors. Firstly, out of the half to two thirds of the Falasha population that was wiped out during these four years, it seems likely that an even higher proportion of monks suffered from the famine.<sup>126</sup> Secondly, there would appear to have been a change in the Falashas' attitude towards the monks during the Great Famine. With the tremendous loss of life that was experienced, celibacy as a mode of existence was frowned upon by many.<sup>127</sup> The Protestant mission thus instigated a decline in the authority of this hitherto revered institution, a process accelerated during the Great Famine and continued by the Jewish mission to the Falashas.

### Religious Reformation

One religious practice of the Falashas which was constantly attacked by the mission was the sacrificing of animals. This custom took place on specific days and festivals. According to the missionaries, the attack on the Falashas' religious leadership together with other preaching, contributed to widespread apathy towards the practice of sacrifice.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> See Kaplan, *Beta Israel*, p.151.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> In *JJ*, 1 October 1869, p.245, Flad wrote of the contention that arose between Falasha converts and their priests on the question of sacrifices. In *JR*, May 1871, Beroo informed Flad that many Falashas did not offer burnt offerings as they were convinced that sacrifice did not

It does appear, however, that apart from a temporary lull in sacrificial offerings between 1862 and 1868,<sup>129</sup> the priests continued to offer sacrifices at their allocated times. The practice of sacrifice was unaffected by the missionaries' attempts to bring about its cessation.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, other distinctive Falasha customs were also, generally, unaffected by the impact of the missionary work.

Nevertheless, with the Great Famine of 1888, we once again witness the incidental realization of one of the missionaries' objectives. For more than four years, according to Kaplan, there were simply no animals available to be sacrificed. Therefore, as in the case of monasticism, he concludes, "the combination of religious criticism and practical difficulties appear to have produced permanent

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remove sin. See also *JII*, 1 May 1964, p. 111.

<sup>129</sup> This supposed break from tradition may have resulted from a ban imposed upon the Falashas by Emperor Tewodros II from October 1862 until his death in 1868. According to missionary reports, the ban on sacrifices ensued from a case being brought before the emperor by Falasha leaders in an attempt to defend themselves against the missionaries' attack on sacrifices. (See Flad, *JR*, April-May 1863). According to Leslau and confirmed by a text written by the Falashas themselves, the reason for the debate and the final result was an argument concerning the Unity or Trinity of God. (W. Leslau, 'Falasha Religious Dispute,' pp. 71-95). In Joseph Halevy's account, the main reason for the meeting was the intended conversion of the Falashas by the missionaries. (J. Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia* in A. Lowy (ed.), *Miscellany of Hebrew Literature*, (London, 1877), pp. 72-73).

<sup>130</sup> In 1899, Hiob Negoosie reported that a Falasha priest declared to his congregation: "my children our faith is the true faith, and our bloody sacrifices have been ordered to us by Moses. We will remain what we are." *JMI*, March 1901, p. 44.

changes in sacrificial practice."<sup>131</sup> By the turn of the century, the number of occasions when sacrifices were offered would appear to have diminished.<sup>132</sup>

#### The Establishment of Contact Between the Falashas and World Jewry.

The most significant long term impact of the missionary era on Falasha society is indisputably the contact that was established between the Falashas and Western Jewish centres. It is evident that the missionaries contributed to a process which resulted in the Falashas being brought to the attention of European Jews. There were several factors involved in this process.

Firstly, one should not overlook the fact that the initiative for contact with 'other Jews' was taken by the Falashas themselves and would appear to predate the arrival of the missionaries.<sup>133</sup> For example, in 1855, a Falasha named "Daniel ben Hanina" from Gondar arrived in Jerusalem with his son, "Moshe". During the course of their visit, they brought the subject of the Falashas and their customs to the attention of a group of Rabbis. They, in turn, presented Daniel a signed letter addressed to the heads of

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<sup>131</sup> Kaplan, *Beta Israel*, p.152.

<sup>132</sup> As Kaplan suggests; compare the long list of sacrifices in J.M. Flad, *The Falashas (Jews) of Abyssinia*, (London, 1869), pp. 52-54 to the shorter list in J. Faitlovitch, *Notes d'un Voyage Chez Les Falachas*, (Paris, 1905), p.23.

<sup>133</sup> See Seeman, *Images of Continuity*, pp.23-25.

the Falashas inviting them to send three or four representatives to study Torah in Jerusalem.<sup>134</sup> Contrary to Mordechai Eliav's account,<sup>135</sup> the Falashas appear to have sent at least two replies to this letter. In one response, which is perhaps the most noteworthy, the Falashas asked the Rabbis to "send us educated men from among you that we might teach them the principles of the religion of Israel which are accepted by us."<sup>136</sup>

Secondly, it should also be recalled that the subject of the Falashas had already been researched and discussed by Jews prior to the official commencement of the mission. As we noted in the previous chapter, the most significant contributors to the first reliable information written on the Falashas were Antoine d'Abbadie and Filosseno Luzzatto.

Without the mission reports,<sup>137</sup> in conjunction with Luzzatto and D'Abbadie's research,<sup>138</sup> it is perhaps unlikely that the Falashas would have been brought to the

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<sup>134</sup> See Eliav, 'Awakening,' pp. 66-67 and Kaplan, *Beta Israel*, p.139.

<sup>135</sup> Eliav, 'Awakening,' p.67.

<sup>136</sup> M. Waldman, *The Jews of Ethiopia*, (Jerusalem, 1985), p.127.

<sup>137</sup> See Eliav, 'Awakening,' p.67.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. A.Z. Aescoly, *The Book of the Falasha*, (Tel Aviv, 1943), p.174.

attention of Jews such as Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer<sup>139</sup> who subsequently became dedicated to their cause. On 11 October 1864, he issued a public proclamation which appeared in many leading Jewish newspapers around the world.<sup>140</sup> In this 'Circular to all our brothers, the children of Israel,' he appealed to Western Jews to assist their co-religionists who were under pressure to convert to Christianity by the missionaries. Using 'proofs' from the writings of Radbaz, Luzzatto and ironically, the missionaries themselves, he attempted to affirm their Jewishness. Hildesheimer concluded that from these reports, "it is clearly known to us that they are our brothers and our flesh, and the time has come to rescue them and restore them to life."<sup>141</sup>

Hildesheimer's circular provoked a widespread and positive reaction to the Falashas' cause from Jewish individuals and organisations across the world.<sup>142</sup> The most noteworthy of these individuals was undoubtedly Joseph Halévy (1827-1917), a teacher from Adrianople, Turkey, who, several

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<sup>139</sup> Hildesheimer was the Rabbi of the Jewish community of Eisenstadt and in 1874 founded the Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin.

<sup>140</sup> See I. Hildesheimer, 'Very Urgent Appeal to all my Fellow Believers,' *J.C.*, 4 November 1864, p.6.

<sup>141</sup> For an English translation of excerpts from this proclamation, see D. Ellenson, 'Our Brothers and Our Flesh: Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer and the Jews of Ethiopia' in *Judaism*, volume 35 (1), winter 1986, pp. 63-65. For the full Hebrew text see M. Waldman, 'A Circular on Behalf of the Jews of Ethiopia - Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer,' *Sinai*, volume 95: (5-6).

<sup>142</sup> See Eliav, 'Awakening,' pp. 71-73.

weeks following Hildesheimer's appeal, indicated his willingness to undertake a mission to the Falashas.<sup>143</sup> In spite of his enthusiasm and suitability,<sup>144</sup> it was not until 1867 that the philanthropic organisation, Alliance Israélite Universelle,<sup>145</sup> finally agreed to assist Halévy in his mission.

Halévy first came into contact with the Falashas in December 1867, seven months after embarking on his expedition. According to his report, the Falashas were initially perplexed by his presence and suspicious of his intentions. Halévy attempted to alleviate the Falashas' distrust of him by introducing himself in familiar terms:-

Oh my brethren, I replied, I am not only a European; I am like you an Israelite.<sup>146</sup> I come ... to inquire into the state of my co-religionists, in conformity with the desire of a great Jewish Association existing in my country. You must know, my dear brethren, that I also am a Falasha! I worship no other God than the great Adonai, and I acknowledge no other law than the

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p.73. For additional information on Halévy, see Kessler, *Falashas*, pp.120-129.

<sup>144</sup> Halévy was a renowned scholar and very knowledgeable in oriental studies, Ethiopian languages and Judaic matters.

<sup>145</sup> Rabbi Hildesheimer saw the Alliance as the only organisation fully equipped to undertake the mission. (Eliav, 'Awakening,' p.VI).

<sup>146</sup> Halévy introduced himself as an Israelite since the Falashas were apparently not familiar with the term 'Jew.'

law of Sinai!<sup>147</sup>

Contrary to Halévy's expectation, the Falashas' suspicions of him were not allayed. By introducing himself as a white Falasha, he was accused of belonging to the Protestant missionary society since Henry Stern had also introduced himself in this way:-

Perhaps you belong to that society of Europeans who came to Gondar five or six years ago. They also said that they were Falashas and brethren; but as soon as they won our confidence, they began to preach unto us of the Trinity according to the belief of the Amharas, and sought to turn us from the commandments of the Lord.<sup>148</sup>

It would seem from Halévy's report that, after some persuasion and reassurance,<sup>149</sup> he was eventually accepted by the majority of Falashas. This allowed him to gain unprecedented access to Falasha villages and collect information on the Falashas' religion, history and culture. Unlike the missionaries, Halévy was not intent on promoting change in the Falashas' way of life. None the less, in

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<sup>147</sup> Halévy, 'Travels,' p.215.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p.216.

<sup>149</sup> Halévy stated that he "endeavoured to reassure them by explaining to them that [he] had been sent to Abyssinia precisely on account of the apprehensions which the conduct of the missionaries caused to the Association [he] represented." (Ibid.).

discussions with the Falashas, he highlighted practices which were not carried out by European Jews. According to Halévy:-

They would beg of me to acquaint them with the customs and rites of European Jews. They were much surprised to learn that the laws of sacrifice and purification had fallen into disuse among the rest of the Jews in the world ... When I told them that these ancient ceremonies were only obligatory at the time when a sanctuary existed in Jerusalem, and when the Jewish nation lived on the soil of the Holy Land, they shook their head doubtingly. They persisted in believing that we were not going the right way, and said that if they were placed as we are, they would act differently.<sup>150</sup>

On my departure [from Walakaït] several Debtéras accompanied me to a considerable distance and entertained me with theological questions. In their solicitude for my safety, they wished to give me an amulet, which they assured me would prove efficacious against the perils of the journey. I refused it and quoted to them the following biblical passage:- 'Behold he slumbereth not and he sleepeth not-the keeper of Israel,' (Psalm cxxi. 4). Upon which they exclaimed: 'You are right; he who fears God, need

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., pp. 222-223.



entertain no other fear.'<sup>151</sup>

Prior to his departure from Ethiopia, a group of elderly Falashas requested Halévy to convey "a brotherly greeting to their European co-religionists." They expressed to him "their ardent desire to enter into communication with the European Jews and assured [him] that if Jewish schools were established in their neighbourhood, for instruction in Hebrew and secular subjects, they would gladly let their children attend." Finally, a young Falasha, named Daniel, was entrusted to Halévy by the priests and elders in order to be taken to Europe and "instructed in languages and sciences." On his return to Ethiopia, it was hoped that Daniel would be able "to acquaint them accurately with what he had seen and learnt."<sup>152</sup> This, however, did not happen since Daniel died in Cairo before his educational training began.

In his report to the Alliance, Halévy recommended that assistance should be granted to the Falashas, whom he believed to be indisputably Jewish. He was confident that, in their desire to become associated with the Jewish world and to tackle the missionary threat, they should be granted educational and spiritual assistance.<sup>153</sup> However, his

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p.223.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p.250.

<sup>153</sup> J. Halévy, 'Rapport au Comité Central de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle,' *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, (Paris, 1868), pp.85-102.

proposals went unheeded and no action was taken on behalf of the Falashas.

The next forty years were characterised by indifference on the part of world Jewry towards the Falashas. Likewise, the Falashas remained relatively unaffected following their brief encounter with European Jewry. None the less, the process had commenced. Halévy had initiated a connection, albeit a weak one, with the Falashas that was to be recalled when his student, Jacques Faitlovitch visited the country in 1904-05.<sup>154</sup>

Therefore, Halévy's role in the transformation of the Falashas should not be underestimated. The encouragement, support and enthusiasm he imparted to Faitlovitch to undertake an expedition to the Falashas would, as we will see, transform the course of his student's life and indeed, that of the Falashas.

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<sup>154</sup> As we will see, Halévy's visit to the Falashas and Daniel's failure to return to Ethiopia provoked a sceptical reception towards Faitlovitch. Still, Faitlovitch was eventually able to exploit the situation to ease his entry among the Falashas.

### CHAPTER 3

## THE ARRIVAL OF JACQUES FAITLOVITCH

The arrival in Ethiopia of the French Jew, Jacques Faitlovitch, at the beginning of the twentieth century has been considered a significant point in the history of the Falashas. Indeed, his name has become synonymous with the cause of Ethiopian Jewry. He is today considered to be, more than any other single person, responsible for their entry into Jewish history and consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

Faitlovitch has been described as the "Father of the Falashas,"<sup>2</sup> and "world Jewry's 'Apostle' par excellence to the Ethiopian Jews."<sup>3</sup> He is regarded as having assisted the Falasha community "to withstand the efforts of the missionaries and the temptations of assimilation."<sup>4</sup> He has also been portrayed as a "culture broker"<sup>5</sup> who not only "penetrated deeper than any of his predecessors into the

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<sup>1</sup> S. Kaplan, 'The Invention of Ethiopian Jews: Three Models,' *Cahiers d'études africaines*, vol. 132, (33-34), 1993, p.649.

<sup>2</sup> I. Grinfeld, 'Jacques Faitlovitch: Father of the Falashas' in Y. Avner et. al., (eds.), *The Jews of Ethiopia: A People in Transition*, (Tel Aviv, 1986), p.30.

<sup>3</sup> E. Isaac, 'Jewish Solidarity and the Jews of Ethiopia' in S.I. Troen and B. Pinkus (eds.) *Organising Rescue*, (London, 1992), p. 406.

<sup>4</sup> D. Kessler, quoted in Union of American Hebrew Congregation, *Jews in Ethiopia*, no date, Archives of Ben Zvi Institute. (BZ).

<sup>5</sup> S.D. Messing, *The Story of the Falashas: 'Black Jews' of Ethiopia*, (Brooklyn, 1982), p.54.

lives of the Falashas but brought us [world Jewry] to this lost Jewish tribe and brought this tribe to us."<sup>6</sup>

Contemporary researchers of the Falashas claim that "to this day the popular image of Ethiopian Jews is largely that created by Faitlovitch less than a century ago."<sup>7</sup> Some assume that from Faitlovitch's arrival on the scene, the Falasha's "self-identity, religious structure and social mores began to change" and that "throughout the twentieth century, the Beta Israel underwent a recasting of their culture which gradually but inexorably transformed them into Ethiopian Jews."<sup>8</sup>

However, despite the acknowledged importance of Faitlovitch and his work, a detailed comprehensive critical study of his activities and their impact on the community has yet to be carried out.<sup>9</sup> It is the purpose of these next three

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<sup>6</sup> Y. Ben Zvi, 'Dr. J. Faitlovitch, the Dreamer and the Fighter' in J. Faitlovitch, *Journey to the Falashas*, (Tel Aviv, 1959), p.5.

<sup>7</sup> Kaplan and Westheimer, *Surviving*, p.18.

<sup>8</sup> S. Kaplan and C. Rosen, 'Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel: Between Preservation of Culture and Invention of Tradition,' *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, vol.35, (1), June 1993, p.38.

<sup>9</sup> Kaplan in *Beta Israel*, p.2 and 'Beta Israel Studies,' p.15 discusses the fact that despite an abundance of written and oral documentation, no adequate studies exist of Jacques Faitlovitch. (See Messing, *Story*, pp.62-79, Grinfeld, 'Jacques Faitlovitch', pp.30-36, Abbink, *Falashas in Ethiopia and Israel*, pp. 84-92, Kessler, *Falashas*, pp. 130-146, *The Encyclopedia of Pioneers of the Yishuv and their Sons*, volume 7, pp. 2884-2886 and Waldman, *Beyond the Rivers*, pp. 176-227 for background information regarding Faitlovitch's life and activities). Emanuela Trevisan Semi

chapters to rectify this situation. In them, I will examine this turning point in the modern history of the Falashas in some detail and analyse the effect that this man, who unabashedly considered himself to be a 'Jewish missionary to the Falashas,'<sup>10</sup> had upon Falasha society.

The structure of chapters three, four and five, reflects Faitlovitch's multi-faceted programme that he carried out amongst the Falashas and on their behalf. I will begin by introducing Faitlovitch, via a brief description of his background. This is necessary in order to understand how his plans for the Falashas were formulated. I will then analyse Faitlovitch's creation of a Jewish paradigm for the understanding of the Falashas and their customs and examine his various projects and schemes. Finally, the impact of Faitlovitch's work on the Falashas will be assessed.<sup>11</sup>

In the course of my research, I was able to utilise a

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is presently working on a biography of Faitlovitch.

<sup>10</sup> This issue of Jewish missionary work is a subject which Faitlovitch and his Pro-Falasha organisation discuss frequently and will be examined in depth below. It is sufficient to say at this stage that he considered his work "to bring their religious observances into accord with Judaism of the modern world" as "the only missionary work done by Judaism [of his day]." (American Pro-Falasha Appeal 1934, Faitlovitch Collection, (FC), file no. 142).

<sup>11</sup> As I am examining, in this thesis, the external variables which affected Falasha society in the twentieth century, I will be focusing on Faitlovitch, the person and his activities. The actual events which occurred in Ethiopia, during this period, will be examined in connection with Faitlovitch's programme and not as a separate topic.

sizeable body of untapped primary sources. The main source for the archival research was the Faitlovitch collection,<sup>12</sup> based at the Elias Sourasky Central Library of Tel Aviv University, which contains a wealth of information concerning Faitlovitch's activities in Ethiopia and abroad. The archives are mainly in the form of correspondence between Faitlovitch and various Jewish community leaders, heads of State and Falashas but there are also various unpublished reports in which Faitlovitch detailed his findings.<sup>13</sup> Additionally there is interesting material in the Archives for The History of the Jewish people and the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem and also the Public Record Office in London which deals with Faitlovitch's political campaign.

Finally, to investigate the Falashas' reaction to Faitlovitch and his activities and the impact which they had on them, I conducted interviews, during the course of 1995, with numerous senior members of the Falasha community who are now living in Israel.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The Faitlovitch Collection will henceforth be referred to as FC.

<sup>13</sup> In chapters 3 and 4, I have described Faitlovitch's theories and programmes without correcting his inaccuracies. However, the exaggerations and errors in his reporting should be self-evident in light of the information provided in chapter one. In chapter 5, I will critically analyse, using a variety of sources, the effectiveness of Faitlovitch's programmes among the Falashas.

<sup>14</sup> Due to the emotive attachment felt by many Falashas today towards Faitlovitch, it was difficult to obtain an objective report of the impact of his activities from those

### Introduction to Faitlovitch

Jacques Faitlovitch was born in Lodz on 15 February 1881 where he received a traditional education. At an early age, he left the country secretly with a friend in order to complete his studies but they were both forced to return when they reached Breslau. In his home town, Faitlovitch isolated himself from his peers as he was unable to find his niche in society since he was neither interested in commerce nor in the Beth Hamidrash.<sup>15</sup> While many young Jews of his generation were increasingly interested in secular matters, he was involved in research, mostly on religious philosophical doctrines and had started to build what was to become a formidable academic library.<sup>16</sup>

At the age of seventeen, Faitlovitch arrived in Paris and began his formal studies. At first, he studied medicine, then changed to law but the deciding event in his life was a meeting with Professor Joseph Halévy, the well-known Hebraist and Orientalist at the Sorbonne.<sup>17</sup> From the moment of his arrival at the University, Halévy took an interest in Faitlovitch's curriculum and directed him towards the

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Falashas who were involved in his programmes or who had been subjected to the positive propaganda disseminated about him. In most cases, I was therefore obliged to only utilise information gained from interviewees if it was substantiated by written documentation.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Yisrael ben Ze'ev claims that this was due to "his nobility of mind." - Ben Ze'ev, 'Dr. Ya'akov Faitlovitch and his path to the Falashas,' p.1, FC no. 133.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

study of Semitic languages. According to Faitlovitch, Halévy "played a substantial role in the moulding" of his "vocation and aspirations." He considered Halévy to be his "caring mentor" and "the guiding spirit" of his career who had a great influence on his intellectual development. Halévy, in Faitlovitch's opinion, became "the very promoter, the motive force" of his "later achievements performed on behalf of the Falashas"<sup>18</sup> after convincing him of the importance of such work.

Faitlovitch soon began his preliminary investigations into the history, religion and language of the Falashas. He claimed that in the majority of books and articles that discussed the Falashas, the accounts were "no more than a web of stories and fables, historic events and legends, traditions and tales, in which truth and fiction [were] in a thorough muddle, inextricably blended together."<sup>19</sup> He concluded that the vague statements concerning the Falashas which appeared in accounts of writers who had sojourned in the country, mostly contradicted one another. This was a result of their recording either hearsay or reports from Falashas themselves, who, being suspicious of outsiders, were evasive.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> J. Faitlovitch, 'First Acquaintance With the Falasha Problem,' no date but approx. 1940, p.8, FC no.114.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>20</sup> Faitlovitch admitted that there were a "few learnt and speculative monographies on the Falashas published during the last century by some Jewish and Gentile scholars" but during the years of his classical studies



However, Faitlovitch, who as a boy enjoyed reading books on voyages of discoveries and descriptions of ancient and remote lands,<sup>21</sup> read these vague accounts of the Falashas with pleasure, and looked upon them as "fairy tales of the Arabian nights." He had a particular desire "to know something more about the Jewish inhabitants"<sup>22</sup> of Ethiopia<sup>23</sup>. It was after he had become better acquainted with the various complex elements concerning the Falashas, that he realized the necessity of a thorough investigation. He became increasingly convinced of "its far-reaching importance to both the scientific and Jewish world" and sought enthusiastically for an occasion to effect his scheme which "as luck would have it was not long in

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they were out of reach in the libraries that were accessible to him. Ibid., p.2.

<sup>21</sup> Faitlovitch also wrote that "the study of antique and modern history, movements and doings of primitive and exotic peoples, and the inquiries into their legends, traditions and customs, were to me an object of literary and intellectual enjoyment." (Ibid., p.2). He found particularly interesting the accounts and discoveries of those pioneers in "the Dark Continent" and they formed "the kind of ... reading of predilection" which stimulated his thoughts towards the field of African research. (Ibid.)

<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that despite Faitlovitch's description of most previous accounts of the Falashas as devoid of fact, he accepted the notion that they were 'Jewish' without any qualms or hesitation even after having stated that the accounts reminded him of "the relations of the medieval Jewish travellers in far-off countries and the legendary literature on the Ten Tribes, on the tales and anecdotes of the presumptive existence of Jews in some unknown regions." (Ibid., p.3) This was no doubt due to the influence of his mentor, Joseph Halévy.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.3. Indeed, he also stated that these "fantastic narratives of these bold explorers" were "the primary stimulous (sic) to the steady growing of my eager interest in the Falasha problem."

coming."<sup>24</sup>

In January 1904, Faitlovitch left Paris on his first expedition to Ethiopia.<sup>25</sup> This trip was under the sponsorship of Baron Edmond de Rothschild, whose "generous initiative" Faitlovitch credits with opening "a new era" for "the unfortunate Jews of Ethiopia."<sup>26</sup> This first expedition was, according to Faitlovitch, in the nature of a scientific survey in order to verify their number, their distribution, and their economic and social situation.<sup>27</sup>

During his first trip to Ethiopia, he was, in his own words, "deeply touched by their fidelity to Judaism throughout so many centuries, despite persecutions and the activities of missionaries for the past century."<sup>28</sup> As we

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.3. Later, Faitlovitch uses the word 'fate' instead of 'luck' to explain how he was able tenaciously to cling to and carry out his "carefully thought out project." (Ibid., p.4).

<sup>25</sup> For an analysis of the situation in Ethiopia at the time see H. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, (California, 1994), pp.104-115 and H. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia 1844-1913*, (New Jersey, 1995), pp.196-213. It should be mentioned here that when Faitlovitch first visited the Falashas in 1904, they were still recovering from the impact of the Great Famine. Their situation had deteriorated considerably since Joseph Halévy's visit, as a result of this tragedy. (See Kaplan, *Beta Israel*, p.153).

<sup>26</sup> Faitlovitch, *Notes*, p.8.

<sup>27</sup> J. Faitlovitch, 'A Review of the Pro-Falasha work since its initiation 30 years ago,' 28 May 1935, p.1, FC no. 113.

<sup>28</sup> J. Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Pro-Falasha Movement Presented to the Chairman of the Pro-Falasha Committee of the General Conference of American Rabbis,'

have already seen, Faitlovitch considered them to be part of the Jewish people prior to his first visit. It is therefore not surprising to observe in a report he wrote that although "their skin [was] more or less black, ... the finesse of their characteristics, their sharp intelligence, .... and their adherence to their religious convictions" would verify his claim.<sup>29</sup> Faitlovitch considered the Falashas, who were surrounded by "des peuplades à demi-sauvages," to be searching for a way to regenerate and leave "cette barbarie africaine" which was surrounding and suffocating them. He also believed that they were different from other Ethiopians as he felt "une joie indicible en constatant leur énergie, leur intelligence, les hautes qualités morales qui les distinguent."<sup>30</sup>

It was these two aspects- the Falashas' steadfast adherence to Judaism and their incompatibility with their African surroundings- which were to characterise the main components of Faitlovitch's future propaganda campaign. It is appropriate now to turn to an examination of Faitlovitch's theories and research on the Falashas, as

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(no date), p.1, FC no.93.

<sup>29</sup> Faitlovitch, *Notes*, pp. 20-21. As will be seen, Faitlovitch often tried to validate his argument or actions by appearing to be a spokesman for the Falashas by making his words appear to stem from the Falashas themselves or their neighbours. With regards to their Jewishness, Faitlovitch wrote that "les Falachas disent appartenir à la race juive et descendre de nos ancêtres, Abraham, Isaac et Jacob," which is "affirmée même par tous leurs compatriotes chrétiens, musulmans et païens." (Ibid.)

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp.26-27.

these, as will be shown, formed the foundation for all his activities amongst them.

### Faitlovitch's Research and Theories: Creation of a Jewish Paradigm

Faitlovitch firmly believed that the Falashas had been living in Ethiopia for more than two thousand years, completely isolated from and unknown to the Jewish world.<sup>31</sup> Although he admitted that "the history of these Jews" was still not quite clear, Faitlovitch suggested that the most probable theory of their origin was that the Falashas had migrated to Ethiopia at different times, with the first migration occurring a few centuries before the common era. However, he was certain that the Falashas had come to Ethiopia via Egypt.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> J. Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on The Falashas,' no date, FC no. 114 and *Jewish Chronicle*, 'Interview with Faitlovitch,' 27 October 1905. Faitlovitch also claims, on several occasions, that the Falashas "believed that they were the last vestige of the race and faith of Moses." (Faitlovitch, no title, no date, FC no.142).

<sup>32</sup> J. Faitlovitch, 'The Black Jews of Ethiopia,' *The American Hebrew*, vol. 2, (New York, 1915), p.1. In Faitlovitch, 'The Falashas,' *The American Jewish Year Book*, 1920-21, Faitlovitch goes into more detail. He states that "the Falashas are the descendants of those Jews who settled in Egypt after the first exile, and who upon the fall of the Persian domination on the borders of the Nile, penetrated into the Soudan, whence they went into the western parts of the present country of Abyssinia" and then continued to the interior of the country. (p.18) He claims that their numbers were increased by "fugitives who came to join them" after the destruction of the second temple and also by captive Jews led away from southern Arabia, following the wars of the Abyssinians against the Himyarites towards the end of the fifth century of the common era. (Ibid.)

He used their name 'Falasha,' which he translated to mean "strangers," "exiles" or "immigrants," to show that they were "exiled immigrants" and "strangers" who came from abroad to establish themselves in Ethiopia.<sup>33</sup> Despite the fact that "their bodies were assimilated," due to "the heat of the burning Ethiopian sun" which had "darkened the skin of these immigrants," Faitlovitch asserted that "their soul survived" and they remained faithful to their religion.<sup>34</sup>

Faitlovitch maintained that the Falashas' religion resembled Judaism in that it was absolutely monotheistic and they believed in the existence of one, eternal, invisible God. They also rejected any pictorial representation of God, they did not bow down before images nor did they worship saints or prophets.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Falashas,' p.80. He also mentioned the fact that the Falashas preferred to call themselves "Beta Israel, the House of Israel." ('The Falashas' and 'The Black Jews'). However, throughout his lifetime he himself rarely referred to them as such. Chaim Rosen explains this choice of terminology, which was common among other Jews from abroad, as well as Christian missionaries, as a result of the term, 'Falasha' being a romantic term which conjured up the image of a long lost tribe and excited people more than the term 'Beta Israel'. (C. Rosen, 'Falasha, Kayla or Beta Israel,' *Pe'amim*, vol. 22, 1985, p.58). See also S. Weil, 'Collective Designations and Collective Identity among Ethiopian Jews,' *Israel Social Science Research*, vol. 10, (2), 1995, pp.25-40.

<sup>34</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Black Jews,' p.4. Although he admitted that there are no historical documents in writing, he claimed that their oral traditions, faithfully transmitted from father to son, "sustain their claim as Jews." (Faitlovitch, 'The Falashas,' p.80).

<sup>35</sup> J. Faitlovitch, *Gli Ebrei d'Abissinia (Falascia): Impressioni dal Vero*, Comitato Pro-Falascia, 1907, pp. 10-11.

He described the religion professed by the Falashas as "a Mosaism [sic] which their religious literature [had] modified."<sup>36</sup> They did not possess the Talmud, he pointed out, but unlike the Karaites, who were also Mosaists, and restricted themselves to the Bible out of choice, "it is due to ignorance, for which they are not responsible, that the Falashas have remained attached to Mosaism only."<sup>37</sup> Faitlovitch also argued on several occasions that the Falashas did have some acquaintance with rabbinical traditions<sup>38</sup> and many of their customs and practices "harmonize with ours and correspond to our oral laws."<sup>39</sup>

Faitlovitch wanted to demonstrate in his writings that "par leur culte, leur observance rituelle, leurs lois civiles, les Falachas appartiennent au judaïsme."<sup>40</sup> It was thus necessary for him to portray the similarities, real or

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Nevertheless, Faitlovitch also declared that the Falashas "like all Jews ... do not admit that the revealed law is subject to abrogation or modifications." Faitlovitch, 'The Falashas,' p.82.

<sup>37</sup> 'The Falashas: Interview with M. Faitlovitch,' *JC*, 27 October 1905. Faitlovitch also claimed that the Falashas, unlike the Karaites (and Samaritans) who have rejected the Talmud, "they endeavour rather to become acquainted with it." Faitlovitch, 'The Black Jews,' p.9.

<sup>38</sup> Faitlovitch -: *Notes*, p.21, 'The Black Jews,' p.9 and 'Interview with M. Faitlovitch.'

<sup>39</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Falashas,' p.94.

<sup>40</sup> J. Faitlovitch, 'Les Falachas d'après les explorateurs: notes apologétiques,' *Rivista Israelitica*, volume 4, (3), (Florence, 1907), p.5. The concept of 'belonging' as understood by Faitlovitch will become apparent below.

imagined, between the Falashas and 'other Jews'. On several occasions, he attempted to illustrate that the Falashas' annual festivals were the same as those observed by 'other Jews' and were celebrated in a similar manner, despite contradictions concerning the dates of their festivals.<sup>41</sup> He would describe the Falashas' festivals and fast days in familiar terms, and he would often refer to them by their names in Hebrew.<sup>42</sup>

He also stated that the Falashas carried out circumcision on the eighth day<sup>43</sup> and observed the laws of extracting blood from meat and not eating it raw,<sup>44</sup> as well as Shehita (ritual slaughter).<sup>45</sup> They also "like many Jews .... await

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<sup>41</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Falashas,' p.88. He accounted for this discrepancy by attributing it to the "lack of a co-ordinated system" which caused a confusion in the fixing of their feasts. (Ibid.) However, he also admitted that the Falashas were ignorant of 'Hanukah' and 'Purim.' (Faitlovitch, *Gli Ebrei*, p.12).

<sup>42</sup> See for example Faitlovitch, *Journey*, p.86 where he discusses 'Rosh Hashannah,' 'Yom Kippur' and 'Succoth.'

<sup>43</sup> This "sign of union among them" is "never done on the Sabbath, for it is regarded as work." (Faitlovitch, 'The Falashas,' p.90). He also writes that the Falashas redeem the first-born male child and give money to the priest or synagogue for it.

<sup>44</sup> Faitlovitch, *Notes*, p.24. However, he also admitted that "they do not know of the prohibition against eating milk and meat together" and do indeed, "feast sumptuously on these articles of food, especially on Saturday." (Faitlovitch, 'The Falashas,' p.8).

<sup>45</sup> 'Interview with Faitlovitch.' However, Faitlovitch mentioned elsewhere that "per macellare gli animali, li scannano come gli altri Ebrei, ma osservando riti ben diversi." (Faitlovitch, *Gli Ebrei*, p.12).

the Messiah who will re-establish the Jewish nation."<sup>46</sup> Faitlovitch further attempted to demonstrate that the Falashas observed certain biblical ritual observances very meticulously and sometimes even more strictly than 'other Jews'. For example, he wrote that the Falashas "who are very religious"<sup>47</sup> follow very strictly the laws of purification by baths and ablutions,<sup>48</sup> they continue to offer sacrifices on every Holy day with the ceremonies as prescribed in the Bible<sup>49</sup> and "le sabbat est observé, chez eux, plus rigoureusement que dans les autres sectes juives."<sup>50</sup> Finally, Faitlovitch stated that "like other Jews," the Falashas "take great care to inculcate in succeeding generations veneration for the religion of their ancestors, and they draw their strength from the same source, from the Bible and traditions."<sup>51</sup>

As well as attempting to highlight the supposed

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<sup>46</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Falashas,' p.87.

<sup>47</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Interview with Faitlovitch.'

<sup>48</sup> Faitlovitch, Notes, p.23. He states that if a Falasha touches a non-Jew, he must isolate himself until the evening when he must immerse himself. Also, Faitlovitch claimed that the Falasha women rigorously observed the traditional Jewish law of 'niddah' each month when they isolated themselves during menstruation. (Ibid.)

<sup>49</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Black Jews,' p.9. However, elsewhere he stated that "ils n'offrent plus d'animaux en sacrifice" as they used to except on the eve of Passover and certain periods of mourning. (Faitlovitch, Notes, p.23).

<sup>50</sup> Faitlovitch, Notes, p.22.

<sup>51</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Falashas,' p.93.



similarities between normative Judaism and Falasha 'Judaic' practices, Faitlovitch strove to find parallels between the Falashas' history and that of world Jewry. Several central connected themes appearing throughout the latter have been 'Jewish persecution,' 'suffering as Jews,' and 'Jewish martyrdom,' all of which were utilised by Faitlovitch for propaganda purposes to describe the Falashas' fate throughout "their centuries apart from world Jewry." In a discussion on Jewish martyrology, Faitlovitch observed "Oh! les pauvres Falachas, ces martyrs de la foi Judaïque"<sup>52</sup> who, like their co-religionists, preferred death to abandoning the faith of their ancestors.<sup>53</sup> "Like all Jews," he stated, "the Falashas have undergone centuries of misfortune and persecution,"<sup>54</sup> but throughout all these bloody persecutions they have shown the steadfastness which is characteristic of the Jew, and they have not forsaken their ancient worship and faith."<sup>55</sup> Faitlovitch commended

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<sup>52</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Les Falachas,' p.1.

<sup>53</sup> Faitlovitch wrote that "this part of Africa was, like other parts of the world, a scene of atrocities where Jews have had to suffer for their faith." (Faitlovitch, 'The Black Jews,' p.6). He also mentioned that "the history of their martyrology, as succinctly reported in the Abyssinian Chronicles, is full of heroic deeds they carried out in honour of the Jewish people." (J. Faitlovitch, 'Preface,' no date, p.14, FC no.42).

<sup>54</sup> Faitlovitch was keen to portray the Falashas as a subjugated and oppressed people who often had to suffer from regional and local authorities. He asserted that they were continuously compelled to perform forced labour and to infringe the precepts of their ancestral religion. (Faitlovitch, 'Preface,' p.8).

<sup>55</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Black Jews,' p.5. Elsewhere, Faitlovitch described the Falashas as "more resisting and steadfast than a rock against the waves." (Faitlovitch,

the Falashas' courage in the battles which they had fought for their faith with no help from other Jews. "They have kept the flag of Judaism flying in their country," he claimed, and are able to say with pride, "I am black but comely."<sup>56</sup>

Faitlovitch also tried to demonstrate that the Falashas were persecuted for the same reasons as 'other' Jews. In several articles, he referred to the "curse of the Church against the Jews" also being prevalent in that part of Africa. On different occasions, he declared, "crusades were organised against the Falashas" after they were accused of the familiar crime of being "descendants of the 'deicides' of their saviour."<sup>57</sup> In addition, following the accusations of sorcery made against the Falashas, Faitlovitch asked if "les juifs n'ont-ils pas été accusés de ces mêmes barbaries au moyen âge et certains pays arriérés ne calomnient-ils pas encore plusieurs d'entre eux?"<sup>58</sup>

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'The Falashas,' p.81).

<sup>56</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Black Jews,' p.5. This quote is an adaptation from the 'The Song of Songs' which reads "black and comely." The racist aspect of Faitlovitch appears many times in Faitlovitch's writings. He often uses characteristic terminology of white colonialists of his time who considered themselves to be superior to the supposed ignorant, black, barbaric natives. (see N.B. Dirks (ed.), *Colonialism and Culture*, (Michigan, 1992) and Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia*, (New Jersey, 1995), pp. 44-45).

<sup>57</sup> See Faitlovitch, 'The Falashas,' p.99; Faitlovitch, 'The Black Jews,' p.6 and Faitlovitch, 'Les Falachas,' p.3.

<sup>58</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Les Falachas,' p.5.

With regards to the Falashas' literature, Faitlovitch maintained that they possessed a large number of holy writings relating to Jewish history and religion, some of which were held in great veneration by them.<sup>59</sup> He also stated on numerous occasions that the Falashas knew all the biblical books as well as the Apocrypha, those originating before as well as those coming after the time of the first exile. Although the Falashas' order of books of the Bible was different and they did not assign the same canonical value to all the books, Faitlovitch declared that "the Pentateuch has with them the same sanctity as among all Jews; they have the same reverence for it, and they look upon it as their highest authority."<sup>60</sup> This book, according to Faitlovitch, formed the basis of their religion and their whole life was regulated by its precepts.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Falashas,' p.94. Furthermore, he once wrote that "dans la province de Godjan, où ils vivent en grand nombre, il se trouve une grande bibliothèque où il est concentré des livres des falacha depuis le temps qu'ils sont venus de Palestine." (Faitlovitch to unknown, 16 September 1904, FC no.94). Although, the existence of Falasha manuscript 'libraries' is not a fiction, Faitlovitch certainly exaggerates the size and nature of the collection. (Cf. M. Hayon, 'Beta Israel Prayers: Oral and Written Traditions' in Appleyard et al., (eds.), *Proceedings*). I have refrained from 'correcting' Faitlovitch's other errors and misrepresentations in his research unless, as above, the inaccuracy of his reports is not self evident after examining chapter one.

<sup>60</sup> J. Faitlovitch, 'Introduction to Falasha Literature,' no date, p.2, FC no. 42.

<sup>61</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Falashas,' p. 93. He stated that "the Five Books of Moses" are "the pivot, the kernel, the others are considered only as the explanation, the commentary." (Ibid.)

However, Faitlovitch admitted that "apart from the purely Falasha products, as their prayer books and some short biblical commentaries of their own composition or compilation from other works," almost all the other writings extant amongst them were "taken over by them from their Christian neighbours." The latter, by "their confessional relation with Egypt had brought these books from there to Abyssinia and translated from Coptic or Arabic into the Ethiopian language."<sup>62</sup> He did not claim though that any book at any time was rendered into Ethiopic directly from Hebrew. Neither the Falashas nor the Abyssinian Christians had in the past, in his opinion, any knowledge of this language.<sup>63</sup> Faitlovitch believed that all they possessed of biblical and "old Jewish literature" had come to them through the intermediary of various versions from other tongues, from Greek, Syriac, and Coptic in the first period of propagation of Christianity in Abyssinia

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<sup>62</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Introduction,' pp.1-2.

<sup>63</sup> This was, despite the fact, that according to Faitlovitch, the learned and spiritual leaders of the Falashas piously upheld and cultivated the belief which they clung to with implicit faith that "in the bygone days their ancestors were in possession of books written in Hebrew, that only in later times the Ethiopic language and script were used by them." (Faitlovitch, 'Preface,' p.10). However, Faitlovitch stated on more than one occasion that there was "not ... the slightest historical trace to prove this assertion, and it appears that the Falashas forgot the Hebrew language at a very early period, and that their ancestors had already, either in Egypt or in Soudan, before their entrance into Abyssinia, lost all knowledge of it." (Faitlovitch, 'The Falashas,' p.94). Moreover, he also mentioned in the above article that the Falashas claimed that formerly they possessed books in "another language" and in "a different script," but he did not refer to the Hebrew language on this occasion.

and then from Arabic since its expansion as the vernacular in Egypt.<sup>64</sup>

To those who attempted to refute his claim that the Falashas were Jewish and to state instead that they were "simply a mixture of Pagan, Christian and Judaic beliefs," he maintained that this opinion was "not based on any truth." He referred to other travellers who had had direct contact with them, gained their confidence and subsequently declared that "the Falashas are the brothers of the Jews, by religion and by race."<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Faitlovitch stated that "in the religion of the Falashas, there are no Christian beliefs since in their prayers, one finds several passages where they reject the worship of Jesus."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Introduction,' p.2. Faitlovitch did not believe that the Falashas, since their emergence and consolidation as a separate entity in that part of Africa, had "ever had a close ... contact with ... outside Jewish [communities] and they could not consequently have been provided by their co-religionists in foreign lands with new literature products, the post-biblical works produced in Palestine and in the diaspora." (Ibid.)

<sup>65</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Les Falachas,' p. 4. He referred especially to J. Halévy and surprisingly, H. Stern, the missionary whom he earlier criticised. Indeed, he quoted the latter at length, when Stern refers to the Falashas' supposed physiognomical similarities to their European co-religionists-: "among the first group we saw at Gondar, there were some whose Jewish features no one could have mistaken, who had ever seen the descendants of Abraham in London or Berlin." (Ibid.) In an interview with Māngestu Yesaq, a former student of Jacques Faitlovitch, he also described the physiognomical similarities between the Falashas and 'other Jews.' (7 February 1995).

<sup>66</sup> Faitlovitch refers to the translation of the Ethiopian text published by Halévy in his *Revue Sémitique* where in it one reads that "a number of them, among the men and women, were put to death for not invoking the name of Mary." (Faitlovitch, 'Les Falachas,' p.5). Furthermore he

Therefore, despite the fact that the Falashas were ignorant of the Hebrew language and it was difficult to "distinguish them physically from the Aborigines,"<sup>67</sup> as they dressed like them and spoke the same language, this was not, according to Faitlovitch, sufficient evidence to disprove their Jewish origins.<sup>68</sup> On the contrary, he believed it supported his theory that they were descended from Jews who had emigrated from Palestine before the Common Era, rather like the Israelite emigrants who established themselves in Egypt and Greece who also adopted the language of the country and eventually forgot their original language.<sup>69</sup> If certain travellers denied that the Falashas belonged to the Jewish nation, not one of them, he declared, "could contest their Mosaic (sic) religion."<sup>70</sup>

It is evident from the above analysis that Faitlovitch, in his published articles,<sup>71</sup> attempted to depict the Falashas

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states, in the same article, that in their literature one notices the abhorrence which they have of Christianity and paganism. (Ibid.)

<sup>67</sup> Faitlovitch, *Gli Ebrei*, p.10. Faitlovitch stated that "bisogna vederli ed esaminarli da presso per osservare la finezza dei tratti che li caratterizzano." (Ibid.)

<sup>68</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Les Falachas,' p. 5.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> It is important to note that throughout Faitlovitch's lifetime, he rarely changed his opinion concerning the Falashas. Therefore, his theories in his first writings were similar, if not identical, to his later ones. It would appear that he was more interested in publicising the cause of the Falashas than in portraying factual accuracy. Nevertheless, his unpublished writings

as a "Jewish outpost"<sup>72</sup> who were out of place in their African environment. As we have seen, he was keen to present in his articles supposed similarities between the Falashas and 'other Jews' by attempting to draw comparisons between their respective religions, festivals, religious literature and history etc. He also made use of familiar language and terminology in describing the Falashas' religion and customs, using, wherever possible, Hebrew vocabulary or Jewish replacement words for the Falashas' nomenclature.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, throughout his writings, Faitlovitch referred to many Falashas and especially his students by Hebraised versions or even Hebrew replacements for their Amharic and Ge'ez names.<sup>74</sup>

Faitlovitch further tried to demonstrate that "grâce au

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generally tended to be more objective in their analysis, which was probably the reason they remained unpublished. (See, especially, Faitlovitch, 'Introduction' in which he writes, for example, that "in the form of their worship there is nothing in common with other extant Jewish groups," p.4).

<sup>72</sup> Faitlovitch to unknown, 29 January 1915, FC no.100.

<sup>73</sup> For example, Faitlovitch nearly always referred to the 'Orit' as 'Sefer Torah,' the 'Mesgid' as 'Synagogue,' and Falasha festivals in their Hebrew 'equivalent.'

<sup>74</sup> For example, he replaced Hezgeyas Finhas with Hizkiahu Pinkus; Léwî with Levi; Abba Barok with Abba Baruch. For the purpose of this examination, I have adopted, whenever possible, David Appleyard's recommended method for the spelling of Ethiopian names and places. It should be noted though that there are occasions when I have left the name as it appeared in a document, since either an unrecognisable spelling was used or we are unaware of a person's former Ethiopian name before he or she adopted a Hebrew one.

Judaïsme,"<sup>75</sup> the Falashas "sont moralement et physiquement supérieurs aux autres Abyssins,"<sup>76</sup> ignoring their many similarities with other Ethiopians. He wrote that it was common for travellers<sup>77</sup> to comment that, unlike the other Ethiopians, who were backward, uncivilized and opposed to progress, the Falashas were intelligent<sup>78</sup> as "nearly all were literate," industrious and had a great ardour for work, especially agriculture.<sup>79</sup> If encouraged, he predicted that "ils serviront donc de levier pour entraîner toute l'Abyssinie à adopter des mœurs conformes au progrès."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Faitlovitch stated elsewhere that "their religion has kept them far away from the barbarous African life and customs." For example, he noted that "unlike the rest of the population, they abstain from eating raw meat, and it is due to this that they are free from tenia (tape worm)." (Faitlovitch, 'The Black Jews,' p.10).

<sup>76</sup> Faitlovitch to the President of the 'Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden,' 8 January 1907, FC no.94. He stated elsewhere that "as Jews, the Falashas appear to us both from the standpoint of Judaism and morality." Since their "moral status is higher than that of their neighbours," it is "a credit to Jewry." (Faitlovitch to the President of the Conference of American Rabbis, 20 June 1911, FC no. 99).

<sup>77</sup> Faitlovitch wrote that "their life and moral superiority is testified to by all travellers." (Faitlovitch, 'The Black Jews,' p.10).

<sup>78</sup> Indeed, Faitlovitch believed that "la loro credenza, strettamente monoteista, elevo la loro intelligenza ad un livello, che gli Aborigeni, semi-feticisti, non potevano raggiungere." (Faitlovitch, *Gli Ebrei*, p.10).

<sup>79</sup> Faitlovitch claimed that due to the Falashas' "instruction et leur travail, les autres habitants reconnaissent leur supériorité et leur sont dévoués." (Faitlovitch to an Italian official in Eritrea, 29 November 1905, FC no.24).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. This was a recurring theme in Faitlovitch's articles and correspondence since he believed that once "regenerated," the Falashas "may one day work amongst the African natives for civilisation and moral progress."



As will become apparent, Faitlovitch's motivation behind his inaccurate portrayal of the Falashas in his publications was to detach them from their Ethiopian context and to make them more 'palatable' and acceptable to world Jewry.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, he often knowingly distorted the facts, belittled the differences between the Falashas' religion and normative Judaism<sup>82</sup> and purported unsubstantiated explanations for the aforementioned discrepancies to achieve this objective. After his first expedition, he dedicated himself to a venture that would attempt to bring the Falashas closer to Judaism and world Jewry closer to the Falashas. It was this symbiotic relationship that Faitlovitch strove towards with fervour and passion. He became "obsessed where his whole life was

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(Faitlovitch, 'The Black Jews,' p.14). Faitlovitch understood that this would create a positive attitude in Ethiopia towards Jews and Judaism. (See Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Falashas').

<sup>81</sup> Although Faitlovitch consistently referred to 'world Jewry' and the 'Jewish world' in his writings, his educational, political and fundraising campaigns on behalf of the Falashas were focussed primarily on the Jews of Western countries.

<sup>82</sup> He rarely mentioned the fact that the Falashas practised monasticism or carried out female circumcision and when he did, he denied that it still existed. In an article in which he criticised various authors for supposedly reporting incorrect details concerning the Falashas, he stated that "the words of the author [referring to Aescoly] regarding female circumcision are incorrect. Circumcision of females which is carried out amongst most of the tribes of Abyssinia is optional but not essential amongst the Falashas, and in general the custom has already become out-dated and as far as I know many of them do not carry out this operation on their children." (J. Faitlovitch, 'Hypothetical Laws of the Falashas,' Tarbitz (in Hebrew), vol. 7, 1936, pp.373-379).

consecrated to assisting them"<sup>83</sup> in the manner he deemed appropriate.

#### Faitlovitch's Aims, Objectives, Plans and Hypotheses

Faitlovitch envisioned a programme that would, he hoped, result in the "revival and strengthening of Judaism in Abyssinia,"<sup>84</sup> an amelioration of the Falashas' religious and political situation and a development of their economical, intellectual and social proficiency.<sup>85</sup> He anticipated that with these improvements to the Falashas' lives, their "self-consciousness as a group" would be elevated and a "great measure of pride and self-respect" would be inculcated.<sup>86</sup> This internal regeneration, he asserted, would help combat the missionaries and bring an

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<sup>83</sup> L. Berman (sister of J. Faitlovitch) in an interview with A. Sherman, 'The Falashas in Israel,' *The Israel Magazine*, Feb. 1973, p.59. Elsewhere, it is written that "Faitlovitch became obsessed with the idea of going to seek his brethren." (The American Pro-Falasha Committee, *The Romance of the Falashas-The Romantic Study of an Exotic Jewish Group*, approx. 1938). Faitlovitch considered himself to be a "martyr of devotion." (Report presented to C. Adler, Chairman of the American Jewish Committee, December 1921, FC no. 113).

<sup>84</sup> Faitlovitch to Adler, 19 December 1920, FC no.141. Faitlovitch stated on numerous occasions that the situation of the Falashas had worsened in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as their "Jewish self consciousness" had "become more and more dim and their Jewish communal life more and more disorganised." (Faitlovitch to Adler, 28 June 1922, AJDC archives, New York, file no. 165).

<sup>85</sup> Faitlovitch to American Jewish Committee, 4 January 1921, FC no.100.

<sup>86</sup> J. Faitlovitch, 'Work of the American Pro-Falasha Committee in Abyssinia, 1923-27,' no date, FC no.113.

end to conversions.<sup>87</sup> Faitlovitch was convinced that one generation was sufficient "to raise our Abyssinian brethren to a high level of Judaism and of culture in general"<sup>88</sup> and thus in his opinion, "from a primitive people to that of a highly civilised type."<sup>89</sup>

Faitlovitch considered their "abysmal ignorance" as "the most single impediment to their spiritual and cultural development."<sup>90</sup> He therefore believed that education for them was a "resurrectory force which [would] rescue them from the arms of apathy to regenerate their social state."<sup>91</sup> If provided with Jewish education there was every guarantee that the Falashas would "remain Jews" and "approach more and more to the standards of modern

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<sup>87</sup> Faitlovitch to American Pro-Falasha Committee, 22 March 1923, FC no.99. See also: Faitlovitch, *Journey*, p.159. Faitlovitch's aims would appear to contradict one another as he believed it was necessary to reform and change the Falashas in order to ensure the continuation of their existence. A paradox ensues when Faitlovitch declares that the Falashas would have to undergo change in order to ensure the continuation of their existence as Jews. This theme will be examined below.

<sup>88</sup> Faitlovitch to Chairman of American Jewish Committee, 14 June 1921, FC no.99.

<sup>89</sup> Faitlovitch to unknown, no date, Zionist Archives (ZA), no. A364/10014a. Note: the evolutionary language used by Faitlovitch. Other key words used include 'progress' and 'development.'

<sup>90</sup> American Pro-Falasha Committee, *The Romance of the Falashas*, p.11.

<sup>91</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Les Falachas,' p.10.

Judaism."<sup>92</sup> Therefore, education and especially Jewish instruction formed a central part of Faitlovitch's proposed programme. The chief purpose of religious education was to "enlarge and develop the religious knowledge of the Falashas by bringing them in contact with the Hebrew Bible with which they are as yet unfamiliar"<sup>93</sup> and for the Falashas to become better acquainted with their own sacred literature.<sup>94</sup> Faitlovitch further believed that once enlightened and given a general education, the Falashas would be able "to render good service to Judaism and culture generally" and may even one day "work amongst the African natives for civilisation and moral progress."<sup>95</sup>

Faitlovitch understood that only "by appropriating ... Western culture" would the Falashas, like other Ethiopians, "be able to wake from their millennial lethargy, shake off the African torpor and become again a factor of

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<sup>92</sup> J. Faitlovitch, 'The Falashas- Presentation to the Chairman and Members of the Falasha Committee of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations,' no date, FC no.142. Indeed, he stated that it was through religious education that "they would be preserved from assimilation and extinction" and would be freed from "the claws of the missionaries." (Faitlovitch, 'The Black Jews,' p.13. On the other hand, Faitlovitch stated that "if we abandon them to their own spiritual resources, they may soon be lost to the Jewish people." (Ibid.) Note the contradiction once again between Faitlovitch's desire to 'preserve' the Falashas but also to 'change' them.

<sup>93</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Work of The American Pro-Falasha Committee in Abyssinia 1923-27.'

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Black Jews,' p.14.

civilisation in this part of the world."<sup>96</sup> It was no coincidence that Faitlovitch referred to the "other Abyssinians," for he believed that to "enlighten" their "stunted and veiled minds"<sup>97</sup> was also important for the Falashas' welfare.

Faitlovitch maintained that "la tribu juive ne demande autre chose que de s'instruire"<sup>98</sup> and "de sortir de la barbarie africaine qui l'enveloppe depuis des siècles."<sup>99</sup> He understood that this, together with his other objectives, could only be realised with the assistance of "Jews of the civilised world."<sup>100</sup> Faitlovitch therefore saw Western Jewry as a significant partner in his programme, both for financial and practical support. He hoped that "an intimate relationship between the hitherto isolated Falasha

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<sup>96</sup> Faitlovitch to U.S Consul General to Ethiopia, 12 March 1929, FC no. 100.

<sup>97</sup> Faitlovitch considered this necessary in order that the populations of Ethiopia understand one another, training them to live together peacefully. In this way, he anticipated that accusations levelled against the Falashas such as those of 'Buda,' which had caused them much distress, would disappear. (Faitlovitch, 'Translation of the letter addressed to Ras Täfäri, crown-prince regent of Ethiopia,' 25 February 1921, FC no.124).

<sup>98</sup> Faitlovitch to the President of the 'Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden,' 8 January 1907, FC no. 94. Faitlovitch claimed that the Falashas were "burning with a desire to know and to be initiated in the Jewish religion in its entirety in order to practise it like their coreligionists." (*Jewish Chronicle*, 'Interview with M. Faitlovitch,' 27 October 1905).

<sup>99</sup> Faitlovitch to President of the Society 'Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden,' 8 January 1907.

<sup>100</sup> Faitlovitch to the Joint Distribution Company, 31 January 1921, FC no.100.

community and the rest of the Jewish world" would "lead to the spiritual and moral regenerating and the material emancipation of these co-religionists."<sup>101</sup> One of his main aims was thus to get Jewish organisations involved in his scheme and to establish new ones specifically for this task.<sup>102</sup> Faitlovitch feared that unless the Jews of Europe came to their aid, the Falashas would slowly disappear.<sup>103</sup> He realised though that he would first have to convince Western Jewry, through international educational campaigns, that the Falashas were Jewish and that they were worthy of assistance.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Falashas.'

<sup>102</sup> Although Faitlovitch stated that "the Falashas do not ask for charity" but "yearn for Judaism, their old religion," he understood that in order to give the Falashas "the necessary religious instruction they require, and to place on a sure foundation the moral progress they have already made and that there may be less conversions in the future," it was necessary to raise funds through various committees. (Faitlovitch to President of the Conference of American Rabbis, 20 June 1911, FC no.99).

<sup>103</sup> Faitlovitch to the President of 'Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden,' 8 January 1907, FC no. 94.

<sup>104</sup> Faitlovitch wrote in his unpublished notes that religious life was on the wane everywhere, especially in the United States. The Falashas, he claimed, "presented an opportunity to fertilize the roots of our religion," for if the story of the Falashas "is widely enough disseminated here and abroad, it is bound to quicken the ebbing pulse of Jewish spirituality everywhere." (Untitled, undated document, FC no.137). The Falasha cause was also presented in 1935 as a "challenge to those who are seeking to break down the Jewish race," for "if the Falashas can be strengthened and if the Ethiopian-Jewish situation can be dramatised to the world, it is certain that it will give strength to Jews everywhere." (Executive Secretary of the American Pro-Falasha Committee to Israel Goldstein, 18 October 1935, ZA no. A364/10014a).

Faitlovitch saw his campaign as work of the "utmost importance to the Jewish people"<sup>105</sup> and as a way of bringing honour to the Jewish name and world Jewry.<sup>105</sup> He believed his task of preserving the "Falashas from destruction and from assimilation" to be "a duty incumbent upon all Jews,"<sup>106</sup> as a "fraternal duty."<sup>107</sup> He claimed that the remnant<sup>108</sup> of the Falashas looked to the Jewish world for moral support<sup>109</sup> and to bring their religious observances into accord with Judaism of the modern world.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, Faitlovitch unabashedly considered himself to be a Jewish missionary. He saw his project as a "noble piece of missionary work undertaken for the first

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<sup>105</sup> Faitlovitch to the 10th Convention of I.O.B.B, 15 April 1915, FC no. 142.

<sup>105</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Falashas.' He also planned to assist non-Falashas to achieve the aforementioned objective.

<sup>106</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Falashas,' p.100. Elsewhere it is written that "to afford them ... support is really the duty of the whole Jewish world" and "it should be a point of honor with all Jews to save for our faith so considerable a part of our body." (International Pro-Falasha Committee, Frankfurt, approx. 1915, FC no. 142).

<sup>107</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Black Jews,' p.14.

<sup>108</sup> Faitlovitch reported that the Falashas had dwindled from 200,000 in 1868 to 50 to 60,000 in his day. (Faitlovitch to the Chairman of and Members of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, no date, FC no.142).

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Rabbi M. Weiss (Secretary of the American Pro-Falasha Committee), 'The Origin of The Falashas,' no date, F.C. no.142.

time in the history of the world by Jews and for Jews"<sup>111</sup> and considered it the only remedy to save the Jews and the world for the Jewish ideal.<sup>112</sup>

Faitlovitch realised that if he were going to attract Jewish communities' attention to his cause, the Falashas would first have to undergo (or at least appear to undergo) certain changes to bring them into line with 'other Jews.' Therefore, a vicious circle was instituted as Faitlovitch realised that he would only be able to 'assist' the Falashas through the financial and practical support of Western Jewry. Yet, he knew that the latter would not come to their aid unless the Falashas first made certain changes to their lifestyle and religion.

Although, as will be seen, Faitlovitch's aims and

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<sup>111</sup> Faitlovitch to the Tenth General Convention, I.O.B.B., 15 April 1915, FC no. 142. He tried to substantiate his 'missionary work' by attempting to portray the "vogue in Jewish circles to look upon a mission idea as something alien to the Jews' genius of the Jewish people" as "a gross misreading of history." (Faitlovitch, untitled, undated document, FC no.113). He claimed that "the Jewish people heeded the call of their mission throughout all the phases of their existence" as it "called for a positive affirmation of Jewish values and did not imply a negation of the Jewish heritage or Jewish values." (Faitlovitch, untitled, undated document, FC no.133). "Whether we like it or not," he stated, "Jews have been a missionary people." (FC no.113.) He quoted Judge Sulzerger to support his claim who wrote that if "the Falashas of Abyssinia had been a branch of any Christian Church, they would have attracted super-human missionary effort in the whole world." (Faitlovitch to the Tenth General Convention, 15 April 1915, FC no.142).

<sup>112</sup> Faitlovitch to the Chairman of the American Pro-Falasha Committee, 12 June 1933, FC no.100.



objectives changed somewhat during the course of his life,<sup>113</sup> he realised throughout that the key to the Falashas' salvation lay ultimately with Western Jewry. Therefore, he placed as great an emphasis (if not more) on enlightening the latter with regards to the 'Ethiopian Jews' as he did on instructing the Falashas on Judaism. He understood that producing articles would not in itself prove sufficient to motivate Jewish communities (or Falashas, as will be seen) to take action. Rather he would have to visit countries with large Jewish populations, as well as Ethiopia, to spread his propaganda. It is subsequently of no surprise that Faitlovitch was accused of considering himself to be "a State ambassador" rather than "a man without a government or country"<sup>114</sup> behind him.

#### Methods and Programmes

After examining Faitlovitch's aims and objectives concerning the Falashas and also the Jewish world, it is now appropriate to illustrate his attempts to realize them, in the face of overwhelming difficulties and obstacles, in the period until the Italian invasion of 1935. What will appear evident in this part of the investigation is that Faitlovitch wanted to show that he was entirely confident as to what the Falashas required and needed. Indeed, he

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<sup>113</sup> As will be examined, with the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, Faitlovitch saw the Falashas' future in Israel as opposed to Ethiopia.

<sup>114</sup> Y. Ben Ze'ev, 'Dr. Faitlovitch and his Path to the Falashas,' 1960, p.6, FC no.133.

would travel abroad and campaign amongst Jewish communities and governmental bodies as if he were the Falashas' spokesman and would visit the Falashas and the local authorities as if he were the Falashas' saviour and "determiner of [their] destiny."<sup>115</sup>

Following his return from his first expedition and publication of his report to Baron Edmond de Rothschild, Faitlovitch began his public activities on behalf of the Falashas. Initially he embarked upon an enthusiastic campaign for funds in order to return and work amongst them. In a series of letters to the President of a German philanthropic organisation based in Berlin, Faitlovitch appealed for money in order to carry out his programme in Ethiopia for the regeneration and development of the Falashas. The work, he wrote, would comprise the following parts:

(1) To found schools in Ethiopia where the Falashas could "revive themselves in the realm of Judaism."<sup>116</sup>

(2) To obtain approval from Menilek II for the

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>116</sup> Faitlovitch to the President of the Society 'Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden,' 8 January 1907, FC no.94. After his first expedition, Faitlovitch realised that in order to solve the Falashas' problems, it was necessary to provide them with the opportunity to educate themselves in a Jewish manner. He thus saw Jewish schools in Ethiopia as the solution.

project<sup>117</sup> and to ask for his intervention in preventing the abuses of local chiefs.<sup>118</sup>

(3) To obtain foreign protection for the schools and their employees and students.<sup>119</sup>

(4) To send teachers from Yemen<sup>120</sup> to teach at the school and instruct the pupils on Jewish studies.

(5) To translate and publish in Amharic, several religious and historical books then in use in Jewish schools in Europe.<sup>121</sup>

(6) To send some young Falashas to institutes in Palestine where they would receive preparatory

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Faitlovitch to the President of the Society 'Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden,' 3 April 1907, FC no. 94. He thought it indispensable that the protection should come from the United States government due to the country's neutrality in the affairs of Ethiopia. Faitlovitch therefore considered the United States to be the only power which could give this protection without arousing the suspicions of the Negus and other European countries.

<sup>120</sup> Faitlovitch specifically wanted teachers from Yemen due to "their oriental quality." He believed they would be able to relate to the Falashas and adapt well to the climate and "primitive life of Abyssinia." (Ibid.)

<sup>121</sup> Faitlovitch to President of Hilfsverein, 8 January 1907.

training for advanced studies.<sup>122</sup>

Faitlovitch wrote elsewhere that he considered the distribution of Bibles and books on Judaism in Amharic and the establishment of a school as the most essential part of his programme<sup>123</sup> and this will indeed become apparent later on in this analysis.

#### Chronology-: Expeditions and Committees

On returning to Paris from his first expedition, Faitlovitch encountered the same disappointments as did Halévy in his time. Following the death of the Chief Rabbi of France, the Alliance Israélite Universelle withdrew its support from Faitlovitch<sup>124</sup> and he "saw no other way than

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid. Although in this letter, he only mentioned Palestine, it should be noted that on the return from his first trip he brought with him two young Falashas, Gété Ermeyas and Tamrat Imanuél, who were subsequently placed in the teachers school of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in France and then transferred to a school in Italy. Indeed, as will be seen, Faitlovitch would use young Falashas such as these as educational tools for world Jewry and would attempt to place them in schools around the world for this purpose. (For an analysis of Tamrat's life see, I. Greenfeld, 'Taamrat Emmanuel - Forerunner of the Revival of Ethiopian Jewry,' *Peamim*, vol. 22, 1985, pp. 59-74).

<sup>123</sup> Faitlovitch, *Journey*, p.29. These methods parallel those of the Protestant missionaries.

<sup>124</sup> The Alliance subsequently sent Haim Nahoum to Ethiopia in 1908 to investigate the issue of the Falashas. He returned with a very negative report in which he disputed Faitlovitch's suggestions. He concluded that "1) les Falachas sont à peine 6000 à 7000 répartis par groupes de 5 à 10 familles sur une région considérable; il est donc difficile sinon impossible de les connaître tous et de les réunir pour agir sur eux avec quelque efficacité; 2) que nous avons affaire à une population de mentalité encore primitive et à laquelle nous ne pouvons pas appliquer les méthodes d'éducation que l'Alliance a pratiquées au Maroc

to turn to the Jews in different countries in order to save the Falashas from assimilation and religious persecution."<sup>125</sup>

In October 1906 he went to Italy, where he already had good connections, with the intention of arousing support for his campaign. His hopes were fulfilled and he received moral and financial support. With the help of the Chief Rabbi of Florence, Dr. Samuel Margulies, Faitlovitch established in Florence the first Pro-Falasha Committee under the leadership of Margulies.

This first committee set as its goal -: to bring the

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ou en Turquie; qu'il est indispensable de procéder avec une grande prudence si nous voulons rapprocher de nous moralement et mentalement les Falachas." (H. Nahoum, 'Mission chez les Falachas d'Abyssinie,' *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, no. 33, 1908, p.137 and 'The Mission for the Falashas: Interview with Rabbi Haim Nahoum, *Jewish Chronicle*, 21 August 1908, p.14). For additional information on Nahoum's expedition to Ethiopia and to the Falashas see E. Ben bassa (ed.), *Un Grand Rabbín Sepharade en Politique*, (Paris, 1990), pp.135-190. A similar conclusion was reached by Rabbi George Zepin in 1912. He stated that "we are not unacquainted with the results arising from this kind of schooling [i.e academic rather than vocational] applied to Ethiopians in this country. The old fashioned education totally demoralised the average negro. On the other hand, the modern form of education ... namely, industrial education, is the useful and sane form of schooling adapted to a people of primitive mental attainments." He believed that "this 'book-learning' that is contemplated in Dr. Faitlovitch's plan to start a school for Hebrew literature and language in a semi-civilized country" was the wrong form of education "for people of primitive intelligence." (Rabbi G. Zepin, *The Falashas: A Report Concerning the advisability of establishing a school for Hebrew among the Falashas of Abyssinia*, (Cincinnati, 1912), p. 17).

<sup>125</sup> Faitlovitch, *Journey*, p.30.

Falashas closer to European Jewry by distributing religious literature amongst them and by the establishment of a school in Eritrea. However, "owing to the smallness of the Jewish community in Italy"<sup>126</sup> which would have made it too difficult for the committee to raise sufficient funds by itself, Faitlovitch realised that he would have to undertake a "journey of propaganda"<sup>127</sup> to other Jewish communities in Europe which included Austria, Germany, England, Holland and Sweden.

Throughout his campaign, he claimed he heard great expressions of sympathy for the Falashas<sup>128</sup> but it was in Germany that he said he found a special interest amongst the Jewish community for his plans. With Margulies's help, who also campaigned in Jewish institutions in different countries, Faitlovitch managed to widen the scope of his activity, and therefore instead of an Italian committee, an International Pro-Falasha Committee was established, also under the leadership of Dr. Margulies.<sup>129</sup> In March 1908,

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<sup>126</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Review of the Pro-Falasha Work.'

<sup>127</sup> Faitlovitch, *Journey*, p.30.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. However, in his unpublished works, he wrote that as "Abyssinia was so remote .... and so little, if anything was known of the Falashas, that I found it extremely difficult to secure the cooperation, which I anxiously sought." (Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Pro-Falasha Movement,' p.3).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. However, once again Faitlovitch's unpublished notes appear to contradict his published articles. He wrote elsewhere that it was "later" that "local committees were established in various other centres of Europe" and no mention is made of an international committee being set up. (Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on Pro-Falasha').

according to Faitlovitch, the committee went into operation and assigned him the following tasks-:

- 1) To prove to the Falashas that the hopes which they gained from his first visit were not in vain,<sup>130</sup> to strengthen and widen contacts with them and to encourage and intensify their faithfulness to Judaism.
- 2) To distribute amongst the Falashas pamphlets which Faitlovitch had written in Amharic, in which he wrote of the support of world Jewry for them.
- 3) To prepare the ground for the establishment of the school.
- 4) To bring a few young Falashas to Jerusalem, to give them a Jewish education so that they may in the future serve as teachers in the school.<sup>131</sup>

In April 1908, Faitlovitch departed on his second expedition to Ethiopia<sup>132</sup> "to make a further study on the spot of the prevailing conditions and to plan the

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<sup>130</sup> As well as being entrusted with two young Falashas, Faitlovitch also received a message in Amharic from Falasha Priests, calling on world Jewry to pray for the Falashas and not to forget them.

<sup>131</sup> Faitlovitch, *Journey*, p.31.

<sup>132</sup> Faitlovitch claimed that the organisation directed him to go to Abyssinia. (Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Pro Falasha Movement').

organisation of educational work among the Falashas."<sup>133</sup> He took with him Gété Ermeyas, one of the young Falashas he had brought from Abyssinia in 1905 and who had subsequently studied in Italy for two years, in order to report to other Falashas what he had learned. Faitlovitch intended that Gété be "an eye witness of the status of the Jews outside of Abyssinia"<sup>134</sup> and to make it much easier for him to secure the confidence and trust of the Falashas. Faitlovitch also wanted to use him to dispel the rumour prevalent among the Falashas that every Falasha who left Ethiopia would meet certain death.<sup>135</sup>

Faitlovitch also took with him several thousand copies of a pamphlet<sup>136</sup> which he had written in Amharic. This was to provide the Falashas with information "about their brethren" and to urge them "to remain faithful to their ancient creed, as their forefathers had done for generations and to pay no heed to the representations of the missionaries."<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Faitlovitch, *Journey*, p.33. He claimed that this belief comes from the time when a group of Falashas attempted to reach Jerusalem but never returned. Faitlovitch declared that this belief was strengthened when the young Falasha who went with Joseph Halévy also did not return to his place of birth.

<sup>136</sup> The pamphlets distributed among the Falashas during Faitlovitch's expeditions will be examined in chapter 4.

<sup>137</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Pro-Falasha Movement.'



Upon Faitlovitch's return to France fifteen months later,<sup>138</sup> he wrote that he was more determined than ever to bring to the Falashas the help which, he insisted, they "so sorely needed."<sup>139</sup> He asserted that the Falashas pressed him to continue his activities and to speed up the opening of the school for their children. He further professed that the Falashas desired to be taught the holy books and have their faith strengthened in order to be able to repel the missionaries. Finally, Faitlovitch stated that they asked him to turn world Jewry's attention to the shortage of bibles<sup>140</sup> and also requested Jewish religious books to educate the youth.<sup>141</sup>

On leaving Ethiopia, Faitlovitch was presented with another letter written in Amharic, addressed to "world Jewry", expressing the Falashas' hopes and wishes. The letter ended

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<sup>138</sup> A complete account of Faitlovitch's second expedition to Ethiopia is discussed in his book, *Quer Durch Abessinien*, (Berlin, 1910) which was translated into Hebrew in 1959. It is sufficient to state here that this account, which includes a description of life among the Falashas and of the various experiences which he had, discusses the hardships which the Falashas were experiencing and how he intended to help them. Some of the important issues for this analysis which are raised in this book, will be examined under separate headings.

<sup>139</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Pro-Falasha Movement.'

<sup>140</sup> Faitlovitch claimed the Falashas informed him that the distribution of bibles, together with missionary literature, was the main form of persuasion of the Missionaries. Although they were aware of this when accepting the books, they had no other way of acquiring such literature.

<sup>141</sup> Faitlovitch, *Journey*, p.88.

with an urgent plea for help and was subsequently sent to many Jewish newspapers after he returned from his trip. This time, he brought with him another young Falasha, Sälomon Isaac, and placed him together with Gété Ermeyas, in the school of the Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden in Jerusalem which undertook "to maintain and fit them to become teachers among their own people."<sup>142</sup>

On returning to Florence, the hopes which Faitlovitch had placed<sup>143</sup> in the Pro-Falasha committee were dashed when he discovered, to his disappointment, that no real progress had been made towards opening a school for the Falashas. It was his hope, as he departed on his second expedition, that he would be able to give the Falashas prompt assistance to bring them from isolation and rescue them from destruction. However, he not only blamed this situation on the Pro-Falasha committee but also on the apathy of other organisations which were involved. He was still convinced, as he stated to Gété, that the Jewish world would come to the Falashas' rescue.<sup>144</sup> He further asserted that if any other obstacles were to hinder the realisation of his objectives to assist the Falashas, he would not rest or

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<sup>142</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Pro-Falasha Movement,' p.3.

<sup>143</sup> Faitlovitch claimed that the Falashas had the same expectations as he did.

<sup>144</sup> When Faitlovitch left Gété in Jerusalem, he apparently told him "do not despair, Gété, the Falasha matter is in good hands" since "many of the finest Jews are working towards their progress." (Faitlovitch, *Journey*, p.139).

remain silent until the completion of his work. This, he stated, was "for the sake of our brothers, the Falashas, and for the honour of all the people of Israel."<sup>145</sup>

Attempts were then made by the Pro-Falasha Committee to secure financial assistance for Faitlovitch's work. Some money was raised in Europe but according to Faitlovitch, he was requested by the Committee to travel to America in order to secure cooperation for the Falasha project. In 1911, Faitlovitch went to the United States and had the opportunity to meet a number of Jewish leaders in New York, to whom he fully explained the pressing needs of the Falashas and what was required to ameliorate their condition. His project was given a favourable reception and many expressed their desire to be of assistance. Several leaders also suggested that a Pro-Falasha Committee be formed in the United States "to look into all features of the matter, with a view to ameliorate the situation of our poor co-religionists in Abyssinia."<sup>146</sup>

Faitlovitch asserted that the European Pro-Falasha Committee, encouraged by the promises given to him in the United States, saw no reason for further delay in the

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid. In the conclusion to his book, *The Journey to The Falashas*, Faitlovitch wrote that it was world Jewry's responsibility to ensure their preservation and it would be a sin without expiation if the latter were not to come to their assistance. (p.139).

<sup>146</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Pro Falasha Movement,' p.4.

execution of the educational work among the Falashas. This was felt especially as the Committee already had some money in hand, including a contribution from the Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden, an organisation which had shown interest in the Falashas from the very beginning of the Pro-Falasha movement.

In 1912, Faitlovitch departed for Ethiopia on his third expedition and took with him several thousand copies of a new pamphlet he had prepared for the Falashas.<sup>147</sup> He was again accompanied by Gété Ermeyas, who had travelled with him on his second trip. On this expedition, Faitlovitch visited several Falasha communities which he had not seen on his previous trips. He spent several months among the Falashas gathering material about them.<sup>148</sup> However, due to a lack of funds at his disposal, Faitlovitch was forced to return prematurely, after a year in Ethiopia.<sup>149</sup>

On his return to Europe in 1913, Faitlovitch stressed to

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<sup>147</sup> This pamphlet was entitled 'An Epistle of Fraternity.'

<sup>148</sup> It is apparent that despite Faitlovitch's collection of Falasha manuscripts and texts, he published only a small proportion of them and engaged in relatively little scholarly and literary research on the Falashas and Ethiopia, especially during the later years of his activity on their behalf. A select bibliography of his publications will be presented later in this chapter.

<sup>149</sup> Although he was not able to realise his programme in full, such as the establishment of a school for teachers in the Italian colony of Eritrea, Faitlovitch managed to found a small school in the interior. This issue will be discussed below.

the members of the Committee, the necessity of a better organisation for its work. He also noted that Italy was not the most effective centre for this enterprise, owing to the small size of the Jewish community and its lack of organisation on the one hand<sup>150</sup> and the spread of interest in the Falashas to other Jewish communities on the other.<sup>151</sup> Therefore, after consultation, it was decided to transfer the Central Committee from Italy to Frankfurt on the Main which was to be its new headquarters.

Faitlovitch considered this to be the first organisation established devoted exclusively to the Falashas. Although he believed the prospects to be most promising,<sup>152</sup> this organisation was short-lived due to the outbreak of World

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<sup>150</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Pro Falasha Movement,' p.6. Faitlovitch stated that "whatever was done for this purpose [i.e assistance to Falashas] from the time of the Committee's inception until this period (date unknown) was largely due to my sustained personal efforts and insistent solicitation of funds and pleas for interest in this cause." However, when Faitlovitch was out of the country, he claimed that support soon fell away as he was no longer able to continue his propaganda and be in immediate contact with the helpers of the movement. (Ibid.)

<sup>151</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Review of the Pro Falasha Work.'

<sup>152</sup> Faitlovitch stated that the committee undertook the task to provide the means for the school activities in the interior of Abyssinia and also to gather funds for the creation of the school. Furthermore, efficient measures were taken, according to Faitlovitch, to secure more active support from the subsidiary committees in other countries. New committees were also created, "thus enlarging the scope of the work and heightening the interest therein." Faitlovitch stated that as he was relieved of a great deal of the responsibility for the collection of funds, more of his time could be devoted to scientific pursuits and to the preparation of historic and religious literature for the Falashas. (Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Pro Falasha Movement,' pp. 6-7).

War One. Contributions from European Jewry began to diminish as the war progressed and all means for the maintenance of the school suddenly stopped.<sup>153</sup> Faitlovitch realised that he would have to look elsewhere "to replace forces in Germany, Austria and Italy which [had] been absorbed by war" before "Falashas are lost to Judaism forever."<sup>154</sup>

After communicating with members of the Executive Committee in Frankfurt some months after the war began, Faitlovitch was advised, in view of the conditions in Europe, to go to the United States where he had had a favourable reception in 1911. Therefore, in January 1915, he returned to America in order to acquaint the leading Jews there of the situation of the Falashas and to urge that steps be taken to continue the work which the war had paralysed. It was Faitlovitch's opinion that, as European Jewry was powerless to act, "America alone [could] save the movement organized for the purpose of restoring the remnant of the Falashas to the Jewish community."<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Faitlovitch to the President and Executive Committee of the American Jewish Relief Committee, 29 January 1915, FC no.100.

<sup>154</sup> Faitlovitch to unknown, 12 January 1915, FC no. 142.

<sup>155</sup> Faitlovitch to the President and Executive Committee of the American Jewish Relief Committee, 29 January 1915, FC no.100. He stated elsewhere that although the war was imposing "very important and difficult tasks upon American Jewry, the Falasha question deserves consideration along with the most important of them." (Faitlovitch to unknown, 12 January 1915, FC no.142).

Although "the Falasha cause elicited from all sides a great deal of sympathy and many promises of assistance" together with financial contributions from organisations and individuals,<sup>156</sup> Faitlovitch was not able to return to Ethiopia during the war due to the political situation.<sup>157</sup> He was so eager to make contact with the Falashas during this time that he even suggested that an attempt be made "to find an American who could be entrusted with the mission of going to Abyssinia and carrying to the Falashas a Jewish message of hope and relief."<sup>158</sup>

However, in November 1919, with the assistance of the Joint Distribution Committee,<sup>159</sup> Faitlovitch embarked on his

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<sup>156</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Pro Falasha Movement.'

<sup>157</sup> As a national of one of the belligerent European powers, Faitlovitch considered the possibility of travel too dangerous during the war. (Faitlovitch to Dr. Adler, 15 June 1915, FC no.141).

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. This wish was not fulfilled.

<sup>159</sup> The full name for this organisation at this time was the Joint Distribution Committee of the American Funds for Jewish War Sufferers, a category into which the Falashas obviously did not fall. However, as the American Jewish Committee, which previously offered assistance to Faitlovitch, later claimed they "could not undertake the whole problem of the Falashas as it was not organised for that purpose," (Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Pro Falasha Movement') and that following the war, all efforts were turned to the cause of charity and immediate war relief for the stricken European sufferers, a cause which was more popular than "a religious and cultural cause such as represented by the Falasha movement," (ibid) Faitlovitch and his supporters turned to other American organisations. Israel Friedlander subsequently enlisted the interest of some members of the Joint Distribution Committee and convinced them that the misery of the Falashas was the result of the world war and that to bring relief to them was within the purview of the committee.

fourth expedition to Ethiopia. Prior to arriving in Ethiopia in May 1920, he stayed several months in Italy in order to receive the necessary authorization from the Italian government and to collect Tamrat Imanuél.<sup>160</sup> He also went via Palestine in order to collect Sälomon Isaac, who had been studying in Jerusalem since 1909, and also a European teacher and a physician.<sup>161</sup>

The purpose of this trip was not only for educational work but also to assist the Falashas, who "had suffered very much, as a result of the War, from disease and privation."<sup>162</sup> Faitlovitch took with him books purchased in America and Palestine for elementary Hebrew and religious training among the Falashas. He also brought several thousand copies of a new pamphlet in Amharic, the third of its kind, which contained "a plea that they remain loyal to

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<sup>160</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Report presented to Dr. Cyrus Adler, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the American Jewish Committee, on the expedition to the Falashas undertaken under the auspices of the American Jewish Committee in November 1919 till December 1921,' FC no. 113.

<sup>161</sup> According to Faitlovitch, he convinced Dr. Entin, a physician from the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, to accompany his expedition to Ethiopia and to remain among the Falashas for a period of three years. Faitlovitch considered him to be very useful to "our cause in Abyssinia" since he was supposed to "establish a little clinic amongst the Falashas and to distribute the necessary help gratis to Jews and gentiles." (Faitlovitch to A. Lucas, 6 June 1920, AJDC New York Archives, file no. 109). The issue regarding medication to the Falashas and non-Falashas will be examined below. (see page 181).

<sup>162</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Review of the Pro-Falasha Work.'



[their] faith despite difficulties that beset them."<sup>163</sup> During the expedition, he attempted to re-organise the school work he had commenced there in 1912 under the supervision of Gété Ermeyas who was subsequently forced to cease activities during the First World War due to a lack of resources. He also went to Addis Ababa and made representations to the central authorities of the empire, petitioning them to abolish some civil and religious discriminations to which the Falashas were being subjected.<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, on 1 November 1920 in Däbrä Tabor he met with Ras Gugsa Walé, the viceroy of several provinces in central and western Ethiopia.<sup>165</sup> Faitlovitch discussed with him the problem of the Falashas in his dominions and asked for his protection for the school work of Aläqa Gété Ermeyas, as Dämbeya was under his jurisdiction.<sup>166</sup> Finally, a clinic was opened in Wälläqa

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<sup>163</sup> (Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Pro Falasha Movement,' p.14).

<sup>164</sup> This followed on from his audience with Emperor Menilek II who, twelve years before, had began "to act for the amelioration of the deplorable situation of his Falasha subjects." (Faitlovitch to A. Lucas, 31 January 1921, AJDC Archives, New York, no.109). This time, however, he met with Ras Täfäri, the regent of Abyssinia and hoped for an "amelioration of the intellectual, social and political conditions of the Falashas" (Faitlovitch, 'Report Presented to Adler') as he considered Ras Täfäri to be "a liberal enlightened man" who would continue the work of the late Emperor. (Faitlovitch to Lucas, 31 January 1921, JDC, N.Y., file no. 109).

<sup>165</sup> See H. Marcus, *Haile Sellassie I: The Formative Years 1892-1936*, (New Jersey, 1995), pp.28, 31 and 35.

<sup>166</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Report presented to Adler,' p.4. Faitlovitch also mentions in the same report that, in Gojjam, he visited Ras Haylu, who he describes as "one of the most prominent and influential potentates in

where drugs, which were donated by the Joint Distribution Committee, were distributed.<sup>167</sup>

In August 1921, however, due to a lack of funds,<sup>168</sup> Faitlovitch was again forced to leave Ethiopia <sup>169</sup> before any of his plans had been realised in full.<sup>170</sup> In fact, he claimed that his only immediate long-term achievement on this expedition was a re-organisation of the school work in

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Abyssinia," in order to "solicit his favour in behalf of [his] mission." (See Bahru Zewde, *History of Modern Ethiopia*, pp.143-5).

<sup>167</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Report Presented to Adler,' p.3.

<sup>168</sup> Faitlovitch placed the blame for this situation on the American Jewish Committee who, according to him, had failed "to secure the cooperation and aid of other national organisations in the United States." (Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Pro Falasha Movement').

<sup>169</sup> Faitlovitch was presented with another letter in Amharic addressed to the Jewish World, in which the Falashas expressed "their gratitude and satisfaction for the mark of fraternal sympathy given to them" and implored the Jews "not to forget them and to help them in their religious and intellectual wants." This letter was given to Faitlovitch by representatives of Falasha communities from different provinces, who were assembled in Wälläqä, during the previous 'Fast of Tabernacles.' (Faitlovitch to Lucas, 31 January 1921, AJDC Archives, New York, file no.109).

<sup>170</sup> Neither his plan to establish a school in Addis Ababa nor Eritrea was realised. Furthermore, once the drugs had been distributed, the clinic was closed since the physician whom Faitlovitch had brought to Ethiopia from Palestine could not acclimatise to the conditions of the country. Faitlovitch was thus obliged to release him from his contract following their sojourn in Dämbeya. (Faitlovitch to Lucas, 31 January 1921, AJDC Archives, New York, file no.109). This was the case also with the European teacher. (Faitlovitch to Adler, 19 December 1920, FC no. 141). Finally, the young Falasha, Solomon Isaac, who had been trained as a teacher in Jerusalem and "in whose work for his brethren" Faitlovitch had put great hopes, died early on in the expedition. (Faitlovitch, 'Report Presented to Adler').

the interior under the supervision of Gété Ermeayas.<sup>171</sup> Nevertheless, Faitlovitch also managed to take with him to Palestine, his next destination, Tamrat Imanuél and four Falasha children, whom he had taken from the interior of Ethiopia to receive a higher general and religious education abroad.

Once in Palestine, Faitlovitch again reported that he was in a very poor financial situation. Although he claimed that his suggestion that the children be taken to Palestine had been approved,<sup>172</sup> he complained that no advice was forthcoming as to how this was to be achieved without the appropriate funds. According to Faitlovitch, he was simply informed that all funds which had been raised had been transmitted to him and that he could not expect any more financial support. Despite several fruitless appeals to the American Jewish Committee, he was, with great reluctance

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<sup>171</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Report Presented to Adler.' It was also agreed in June 1921, prior to Faitlovitch's departure, that Gété, together with several other boys, would leave in the Summer for Aden via Addis Ababa. There, they would receive further education since Faitlovitch felt confident that the difficulties of fundraising would have been overcome by then.

<sup>172</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Pro-Falasha Movement.' Faitlovitch makes no mention of which organisation approved this plan. Moreover, the American Jewish Committee informed Faitlovitch that they felt he had taken upon himself "certain steps which were not authorised" by the Committee such as "the taking of the children from Abyssinia to Palestine." (H. Schneiderman to Faitlovitch, 21 September 1921, AJDC Archives, New York, file no.165). It therefore seems likely that Faitlovitch's scheme to bring the five Falashas to Palestine had not been approved.

and much embarrassment, compelled to appeal to friends for assistance.

After many difficulties, he was able to find temporary accommodation for two of the four children in an orphanage in Jerusalem and took the other two with him to Europe.<sup>173</sup> Tamrat Imanuél also remained in Palestine.<sup>174</sup> With the assistance of Rabbi Dr. Margulies, Faitlovitch was able to form a small committee to take care of one of the young boys in Italy<sup>175</sup> and the other was adopted by a friend of Faitlovitch, Dr. Ascher, from Neuchatel, Switzerland.<sup>176</sup>

On his return to America in 1922 and subsequent appeals to the American Jewish Committee and Joint Distribution

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<sup>173</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Report presented to Adler,' p.8.

<sup>174</sup> According to Faitlovitch, Tamrat was stranded in Palestine without any means of support, "waiting for a chance to be sent home to go on with the work to which he has dedicated his life." (Ibid.)

<sup>175</sup> The young Falasha's name was Hezqeyas Finhas who was placed under the auspices of the Chief Rabbi of Florence, Dr. Margulies. A committee was soon formed called 'Comitato per il Mantenimento agli Studi del Giovane Falascia,' which was devoted to the well-being and education of Hezqeyas. (A file (P172) on Hezqeyas Finhas and this committee is located in the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem.)

<sup>176</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Report Presented to Adler,' p.9. We do not discover the Falasha boy's name is Abreham until the end of 1922, when Faitlovitch discusses his progress in a letter to the executive of the newly-formed American Pro-Falasha Committee. (Faitlovitch, 26 December 1922, FC no. 127). This patronising attitude towards the Falashas and indeed, towards other Africans, was typical of the times. It is also evident in communication to and from the 'Comitato per il Mantenimento agli Studi del Giovane Falascia' in which Hezqeyas's name is rarely mentioned.

Committee for donations,<sup>177</sup> Faitlovitch realised that he would not be able to rely on these organisations for complete sponsorship for his project.<sup>178</sup> He also understood that the Jewish community of the United States was the only one, at that time, which was in a position to support his project. Faitlovitch therefore considered the best resolution to his problem to be the establishment of an independent committee in America which would be entirely dedicated to assisting the Falashas.<sup>179</sup> Faitlovitch was

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<sup>177</sup> Faitlovitch appealed for \$15000 per annum; \$10000 to cover the maintenance of the educational work and \$5000 to cover the cost of his travelling expenses and maintenance. (Faitlovitch to Adler, 23 June 1922, AJDC Archives, New York, file no.165). When asked by Adler to detail his proposed expenses, (Adler to Faitlovitch, 30 June 1922, AJDC Archives, New York, file no. 165), he listed them as follows:- Maintenance of school stations in the interior - \$2000, Salaries of teachers - \$3000, Maintenance of normal school stations at either Addis Ababa or Eritrea - \$4000, Literature: Text books, Prayer books etc. - \$500, Emergency or contingent expenses - \$500. (Faitlovitch to Adler, 28 June 1922, AJDC Archives, New York, file no. 165).

<sup>178</sup> Cyrus Adler makes this point quite clear to Faitlovitch when he writes to "advise most strongly that you do not rely upon securing the entire sum from the Joint Distribution Committee." (Adler to Faitlovitch, 30 June 1922, AJDC Archives, New York, file no.165).

<sup>179</sup> Faitlovitch was advised by Adler to "take definite steps toward the formation of a committee in America to be followed by the creation of a committee in Europe." (Adler to Faitlovitch, 30 June 1922, AJDC Archives, New York, file no.165). He also suggested in the same letter that the Falashas, who he understood to be "in a fair economic condition as the country goes," could "contribute toward the up-keep of these schools which they so ardently desire." Faitlovitch replied that although Adler's assessment regarding the Falashas' economic situation was correct, it meant "only that they are able to support themselves by their own labour," and bartering is their only form of exchange. Nevertheless, it was his aim that after "they have been raised to a higher social and intellectual plane, they may be able to begin to contribute something toward the support of this work." (Faitlovitch to

still optimistic about the possibility of the AJDC providing him with additional financial assistance for his project.<sup>180</sup> However, he was soon made to realise that if he had any hope of putting his work on a "permanent basis,"<sup>181</sup> it would be necessary to interest as many people as possible in his work "with a view to forming a permanent Falasha organisation" in America.<sup>182</sup>

In July 1922, the American Pro-Falasha organisation was established,<sup>183</sup> the planned programme of which was to

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Adler, 28 June 1922, p.3, AJDC Archives, New York file no.165).

<sup>180</sup> In correspondence with Adler, during the period leading up to and including the formation of the American Pro-Falasha organisation, (28 June 1922, 3 July 1922, 7 July 1922, 20 July 1922, AJDC Archives, New York, file no.165), Faitlovitch claimed that he would require additional funding for his planned expedition to Abyssinia. Once the Pro-Falasha committee was established, Faitlovitch was informed by Adler that if the committee was not willing "to assume the responsibility for this work, then it would appear to be a mere paper organisation." (Adler to Faitlovitch, 21 July 1922, AJDC Archives, New York file no.165).

<sup>181</sup> Adler to Faitlovitch, 5 July 1922, AJDC Archives, New York, file no. 165.

<sup>182</sup> Faitlovitch to Adler, 3 July 1922, AJDC Archives, New York, file no.165. Adler also advised him that a similar organisation should also be formed in Europe (5 July 1922), a suggestion Faitlovitch agreed to undertake "as soon as circumstances would permit such action." (Faitlovitch to Adler, 7 July 1922, AJDC Archives, New York, file no.165).

<sup>183</sup> The American Pro-Falasha Committee was to define itself in 1938 as a group "composed of prominent religious and lay Jewish leaders who realize the importance of the activities being conducted for the rehabilitation of the Falashas and who are eager to implement the program of cultural and spiritual elevation of their Abyssinian co-religionists." (American Pro-Falasha Committee, *The Romance of the Falashas*).

include-:

- 1) The establishment and maintenance of a school in Addis Ababa.
- 2) The organisation of schools and synagogues in the Falasha communities in the interior of the country to teach Judaism.
- 3) Publication of educational literature, including the translation of the Bible, into Amharic.
- 4) The introduction of modern medical knowledge and of sanitary and hygienic methods of living among the Falashas.<sup>184</sup>

On 28 November 1922, Faitlovitch departed on his fifth expedition to the Falashas under the auspices of the newly formed committee.<sup>184</sup> It would appear that the main aims of this expedition were to re-organise existing European Pro-Falasha organisations, to create new interest in other countries and finally to establish a Falasha school in Addis Ababa. Therefore, whilst in England, Faitlovitch endeavoured to obtain British protection for the planned

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<sup>184</sup> News story for the Women's Division of the American Pro-Falasha Committee's Pro-Falasha benefit, March 11, (no year), FC no.133.

<sup>184</sup> Faitlovitch to Adler, 27 November 1922, AJDC Archives, New York, file no.165. Although Faitlovitch stated in the letter that his departure was not as early as he had expected, he was confident that he now had the support of American Jewry.

Jewish school in the capital<sup>185</sup> and to organise the pro-Falasha movement in England.<sup>186</sup> In Italy, he tried to revive the Italian Pro-Falasha movement and especially the small Florentine committee which had taken charge, the year before, of the maintenance and education of the Falasha boy, Hezqeyas Finhas.<sup>187</sup> Finally while in Switzerland, he also tried to find a successful way to re-organise and extend the movement there and in other European countries.<sup>188</sup>

En route to Abyssinia, he travelled to Palestine in order to collect Tamrat Imanuél, who had been studying in

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<sup>185</sup> Faitlovitch to American Pro-Falasha Executive Committee, 26 December 1922, FC no.127. Faitlovitch deemed it necessary to obtain foreign protection for the school as "all the western religious establishments in the oriental independent countries" were "under a foreign, occidental power's protection." He considered it to be "advisable" and "of great advantage to our cause" to take the issue up with the British government because of "its extensive interest and influence in that part of Africa." (Faitlovitch's political programme will be examined further on).

<sup>186</sup> Ibid. Faitlovitch tried to organize a committee in London to work in co-operation with the American Pro-Falasha Committee. However, he found the conditions in the country, at that time, were not favourable to interest Anglo Jewry in the educational work of the Falashas and the "right man" for the task could not yet be found.

<sup>187</sup> Faitlovitch to the American Pro-Falasha Executive Committee, 21 January 1923, FC no.99. Faitlovitch was not, however, able to re-organise the Italian pro-Falasha committee with any great success. He claimed that only a few out of the fifty to sixty thousand Jews in Italy were interested in Jewish matters and that also the Zionist organisation had "extended a very large propaganda ... for the Keren Ha-Yessod." (Ibid.)

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.



Jerusalem for two years, to take him with him to Ethiopia.<sup>189</sup> It was on this expedition that Faitlovitch finally managed to achieve his aim of opening a Falasha school in Addis Ababa. It was officially opened on 1 May 1923 at a site near the Ras Mäkonnen Bridge<sup>190</sup> with Tamrat Imanuél as its director. During the first year of its existence ten pupils were enroled.<sup>191</sup>

One of Faitlovitch's main priorities, with the establishment of the school, was to secure a foreign government's guarantee of protection for the school. The establishment had to be legally registered with a foreign legation "to avoid unpleasant friction with the local authorities."<sup>192</sup> Faitlovitch now believed it advantageous for the school to be considered an "American Institution" under American protection. Firstly, this was because America was held in very high esteem by the Abyssinian authorities.<sup>193</sup> Secondly, most of the contributors to the

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<sup>189</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Work of the American Pro-Falasha Committee in Abyssinia 1923-1927,' p.1.

<sup>190</sup> Pankhurst, 'Foundations,' p.279.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p.2. It was also necessary to provide lodging for these students as many lived far away from the school.

<sup>192</sup> Faitlovitch to E. Frisch, Acting Chairman of the American Pro-Falasha Committee, 22 June 1923, FC no.99. Faitlovitch thought it was "thoroughly impossible" to leave the institution without a western power's protection due to the uncertainty of the situation. He wrote that "as long as the school here is under no protection of a western power, I have to leave out every negotiation concerning it with the Abyssinian authorities." (Ibid., p.10).

<sup>193</sup> This was due to the fact that the United States government had no imperialistic programmes in Abyssinia.

American Pro-Falasha Committee no doubt wanted to have the school under American auspices<sup>194</sup> to maintain the "American character" of the programmes.

On 8 January 1924 a further landmark in the history of the Pro-Falasha movement was achieved. On this day, three Falashas and four Jews residing in Ethiopia, met at the residence of Dr. Faitlovitch in Addis Ababa to establish a provisional committee for the Jewish community in the capital. To this end, land had been acquired for the purpose of establishing a Jewish cemetery and had been registered in the Municipality as property of the community.<sup>195</sup> This date can be regarded as the day of the establishment of the Jewish community in Addis Ababa.<sup>196</sup>

In addition to the school in Addis Ababa, the educational work in the interior continued under the direction of Aläqa

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<sup>194</sup> Faitlovitch had already received notification that the French Legation in Addis Ababa was sympathetic to the Falashas' cause and was willing to donate money to the school project because of its "humanitarian aim." He considered it advisable to accept assistance from France due to a) her influence in Abyssinia; b) the fact that the French language was the most widely spoken foreign language in Addis Ababa and could also be taught to the Falashas; c) the Alliance Israelite Universelle, after having been invited by the French Government to co-operate, could not refuse to offer assistance to the Falasha cause; and d) it was possible to accept the offer of the French Legation without renouncing the protection of the United States Government. (Ibid., p.4).

<sup>195</sup> Document dated 15 January 1924 located in FC no.127.

<sup>196</sup> See I. Grinfeld, 'Jews in Addis Ababa: Beginnings of the Jewish Community Until the Italian Occupation,' *Sixth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, (Tel Aviv, 1980), pp.251-259.

Gété. During the years 1923-24, he visited many Falasha communities together with two assistants, teaching the Falashas elementary Hebrew and the fundamental principles of Western Judaism. Faitlovitch considered this work to be "one of the most important phases" of the programme as it brought them into direct contact with thousands of the Falashas who were scattered in several provinces.

In the second year of the Addis Ababa school's existence, the number of pupils was increased from 10 to 15 thus necessitating a change of building to house the school.<sup>197</sup> On 1 May 1924, the school was moved to a site near Filweha.<sup>198</sup> This trend continued into the third year (1 May 1925 - 30 April 1926) when a further ten students were added to the enrolment. The novel innovation of the year was the provision of instruction for Falasha girls which was inaugurated at the end of 1925 under the supervision of Leah Berman, Faitlovitch's sister.<sup>199</sup>

Between 1 January and 30 April of 1926, fifteen additional

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<sup>197</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Work of the American Pro-Falasha Committee 1923-27,' p.4.

<sup>198</sup> Pankhurst, 'Foundations,' p.279.

<sup>199</sup> According to Faitlovitch, the budget approved by the American Pro-Falasha Committee, in the Spring of 1925, had provided for the expansion of the school's teaching facilities to include a woman teacher. (Work of the American Pro-Falasha Committee 1923-27). According to Grinfeld "the problem had previously been that the parents of [the] girls did not consent to send them to a co-educational school." (Grinfeld, 'Jews In Addis Ababa,' p.256).

students were accepted at the school, making a total of 40 students. Furthermore, six students were sent to Palestine and Europe, after having studied at the school in Addis Ababa for periods ranging from one to two years.

However, it would appear that the American Pro-Falasha Committee was at this time having some difficulty raising sufficient funds in the United States and the payments to Faitlovitch became rather irregular.<sup>200</sup> This, together with the increase in the enrolment placed severe constraints on the school<sup>201</sup> and Faitlovitch was subsequently compelled to reduce substantially the number of students.<sup>202</sup> Then, at the end of 1926, the instruction for girls was terminated as there were insufficient funds to provide for the salary of the female instructor. Similarly, the school also lost its native assistants for the same reason leaving only one teacher at the Addis Ababa school, the director, Tamrat Imanuél together with one student assistant.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Faitlovitch complained, in February 1926, that he had not yet received any money to pay the rent for that year. (Faitlovitch to H. Szold (Hadassah), New York City, FC no.99).

<sup>201</sup> Faitlovitch claimed that in the Spring of 1925, the American Pro-Falasha Committee approved a budget of \$24000 which provided for the enlargement of the school in Addis Ababa to include a section for girls, a special programme in Palestine, and the purchase of permanent headquarters in Addis Ababa. This sum was subsequently reduced to \$13500.

<sup>202</sup> The enrolment was reduced as follows-: 1 May 1926 - 20 students; Summer of 1926 - 15 students; Fall of 1926- 10 students. (Faitlovitch, 'Work of the American Pro-Falasha Committee 1923-27').

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

Despite the poor financial situation of the school in Addis Ababa, Faitlovitch was still able to send students abroad at this time. With the assistance of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, four boys between the ages of 15 and 18 were sent to Palestine to study at the École Professionnelle de Jérusalem.<sup>204</sup> Furthermore, for the first time in the Pro-Falasha Movement's history, two boys were also sent to study in England.<sup>205</sup>

In April 1927, Faitlovitch returned to America in order to attempt to resolve the financial complications that were interfering with his work. On 26 October 1927, Faitlovitch wrote to Tamrat Imanuél from New York, advising him of "une crise extraordinaire" which all Jewish institutions were experiencing at that time, including the Zionist organisations. Faitlovitch therefore informed him that if Tamrat wanted "to save the cause" to which he was

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<sup>204</sup> Correspondence between Faitlovitch and Professor Sylvain Levi, President of the Central Committee of The Alliance Israelite Universelle - 7 May 1926 from Faitlovitch (FC no.100) and 29 August and 27 October 1926 from Levi (FC no. 99). The four boys concerned were "Yeheskeel Messeli, Ezra Ouerge, Joseph Taguenie and Abraham -." Faitlovitch hoped that "cette favorable action marque ..... le commencement d'une nouvelle ère pour l'oeuvre civilisatrice entreprise en faveur des Falachas." (Faitlovitch to Levi, 1926 (no precise date), FC no.100).

<sup>205</sup> Communications from Adath Israel Synagogue in North London to Faitlovitch, 28 March 1927, FC no.100 and Townley Castle Schools, South West London, to Faitlovitch, 31 March 1927, FC no. 100 accepting an offer from Faitlovitch to adopt "one of the boys of the Falasha schools for the purposes of his further education in England." The two boys were Léwî Mäkonnen who went to Townley Castle and Abreham Adgäh who studied at St. John's College in North West London. (Rabbi Schonfeld, Adath Israel Synagogue to Faitlovitch, 20 February 1928, FC no.100).

dedicated, it would be necessary to economise and if required, even to suffer hardship. Faitlovitch instructed Tamrat "to think of tomorrow" and if required to send pupils back to their villages rather than to get into further debt.<sup>206</sup>

In the early part of 1928, Faitlovitch returned once again to Ethiopia. On 8 October of that year, Ras Tāfāri was crowned as King of Ethiopia and Faitlovitch and Tamrat Imanuél were invited to the coronation.<sup>207</sup> Faitlovitch described this as a very important event which would be of great advantage for the development of Ethiopia and beneficial for the Falashas.<sup>208</sup> Just prior to the coronation Ras Tāfāri had donated five thousand Ethiopian thalers as a contribution to purchase some property for the Falasha school.<sup>209</sup> Although a loan of three or four thousand thalers would be necessary in addition to the future King's donation, Faitlovitch described this financial assistance as "a splendid success" for their

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<sup>206</sup> Faitlovitch to Tamrat Imanuél, 26 October 1927, FC no. 137.

<sup>207</sup> Haile Sellassie's coronation as King (negus) in 1928 preceded his coronation as emperor (negusa nagast) in April 1930 following the death of Zawditu. (See Marcus, *Haile Sellassie I*, pp.97-8).

<sup>208</sup> Faitlovitch to Reit, Chairman of American Pro-Falasha Committee, 5 November 1928, FC no.127. Faitlovitch stated that Ras Tāfāri was always very friendly to him and viewed "with great favour" the work of the school.

<sup>209</sup> Faitlovitch to Rabbi Weiss, 12 October 1928, AJDC Archives, New York, file no.165.

programme.<sup>210</sup>

On 26 September 1928, Tamrat Imanuél, on behalf of Faitlovitch, purchased an area of 4,090 square metres in the Giyorgis Quarter of Addis Ababa for the sum of 6,012.50 thalers. It was subsequently registered on 14 December 1928 by the Municipality of Addis Ababa as "a site for the construction of buildings to be devoted to the educational work of the American Pro-Falasha Committee for the Falasha (Jewish) population of Ethiopia." Finally, on 9 January 1929, it was registered at the American Consulate General in Addis Ababa as an American organisation.<sup>211</sup>

In 1930/31 Tamrat Imanuél accompanied Faitlovitch to America, the first Falasha to visit the country, and delivered a speech to various American Jewish organisations in an effort to raise funds for the Pro-Falasha Committee.<sup>212</sup> Also in that year, a Women's Division of the

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid. Although, the amount donated was not particularly large, the fact that an Ethiopian leader had recognised Faitlovitch's programme pleased him.

<sup>211</sup> Affidavit of Tamrat Imanuél to James L. Park, Vice Consul of the U.S.A, 9 January 1929, FC no. 127.

<sup>212</sup> Tamrat Imanuél, in his words, came to "present in ... person a living example" of his "far-away brethren of Ethiopia." (Address delivered by Professor Tamrat Imanuél, 1930, FC no.137). He spoke at length about the history of the Falashas and in particular, the history of the persecution of the Falashas. Nevertheless, he claimed that the Abyssinian needed the Falashas for the production of farm implements and other tools. Tamrat stated that the greatest threat to the Falashas' existence at that time was that of the missionary work of the Protestants which was more dangerous than persecutions and tortures. For sixty years these "fishermen of souls" had, according to Tamrat,

American Pro-Falasha Committee was established which, aside from financial help, also "rendered valuable aid in the direction of propaganda."<sup>213</sup>

From 1933 it became increasingly difficult to raise funds for the Falasha cause due to the situation of the Jews in Germany. According to the Chairman of the Pro-Falasha Committee, "thousands of American Jews" felt that they had to send relief "to these victims of terrible hatred and persecution" and when an appeal for funds was made "nine out of ten answered - I must take care of the Jews in Germany first."<sup>214</sup> The school in Addis Ababa thus experienced further cutbacks and in September 1933, Tamrat Imanuél reported that there were only five students, a reduction of ten from the year before.<sup>215</sup> Furthermore, Tamrat wrote that "il n'existe que le terrain offert généreusement par le Negus Haile Sellassie. Pas de construction qui mérite un tel nom. Pas d'abris pour les élèves." Tamrat therefore stated that "je ne crois pas

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found prey among the Falashas due to their precarious situation in the past. He therefore called on American Jews to assist Faitlovitch with his work in order to combat this threat.

<sup>213</sup> I. Goldstein, 'American Pro-Falasha Committee Chairman's Report Covering the Year 1930,' 10 March 1931, FC no.93.

<sup>214</sup> Faitlovitch to Rabbi Rosenblum, 12 June 1933, FC no.100. At this time, a plan to settle Jewish European refugees in Ethiopia also began to develop. This issue will be examined below.

<sup>215</sup> Tamrat Imanuél to Rosenblum, 1 September 1933, FC no.142.



qu'on aura le courage d'appeler une école, la Dr. Faitlovitch School."<sup>216</sup>

Faitlovitch felt obliged to return to Ethiopia as soon as possible in order "to prevent the dying out of the Falasha work completely"<sup>217</sup> but could not afford to do so. On 8 November 1933, Faitlovitch sent a Radiogram from Tel Aviv to the American Pro-Falasha Committee informing them that the position was very critical and that financial help should be forwarded at once. He warned that the existence of the school was in danger and asked whether he should "liquidate" it completely. He asked that money be cabled immediately to meet expenses for the intended journey.<sup>218</sup>

However, this financial aid was not to arrive. Despite renewed assistance from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and a feeling that a "new spirit" to the Pro-Falasha work was bound to be imminent with "the expected returning prosperity" of Ethiopia,<sup>219</sup> this was not

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Faitlovitch to Rosenblum, 5 September 1933, FC no.100.

<sup>218</sup> Faitlovitch to American Pro-Falasha Committee, 8 November 1933, AJDC Archives, New York, file no.433.

<sup>219</sup> Rosenblum to Addison E. Southard, Legation of the United States of America, Addis Ababa, 1 March 1934, FC no.127. It would appear that Southard was assisting the Falasha school with a mortgage. Furthermore, on 5 August 1934, a meeting of the Jewish community of Addis Ababa was held at the Faitlovitch school. It was decided at this small gathering of 4 Falashas and 5 non-Falashas to "1) D'adhérer à la dite Communauté Israelite et d'élargir avec leur coopération le Comité provisoire de cette Communauté

to be the case. The Pro-Falasha Committee had accepted the fact that "an appeal for victims of persecution [would] take over an appeal for recipients of educational service such as the Falasha Committee gives."<sup>220</sup>

In August 1934, in another letter to the American Pro-Falasha Committee, Faitlovitch stated that "the whole Falasha work is on the verge to collapse completely and if the desired ... help is not reaching in time ..... I will be compelled unfortunately to close and liquidate the school entirely."<sup>221</sup> However, as will be seen in Chapter 6, the fascist invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 prevented the return of Faitlovitch to the country and the pro-Falasha movement was once again placed under the auspices of the

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.... 3) De concourir par des contributions pécuniaires à l'entretien de l'école du Dr. Faitlovitch et au développement de l'oeuvre Pro-Falachas." (Declaration of the Constitution of the Addis Ababa Jewish Community, approved by Tamrat Imanuél and Dr. Faitlovitch et al., 12 August 1934, FC no.127).

<sup>220</sup> Rosenblum to Southard, 20 February 1934, FC no.127.

<sup>221</sup> Faitlovitch to The American Pro-Falasha Committee, 19 August 1934, Archives of the AJDC, New York, file no.433. Faitlovitch continued to discuss the large debt that had resulted from Tamrat Imanuél borrowing money from various sources in order to replenish the funds required for the school. Tamrat discusses this problem in a letter to the Pro-Falasha Committee in which he accuses the organisation of neglecting their commitment to the Falashas and to the school. (Tamrat Imanuél to Charles Isaacson, 30 November 1935, FC no.127). Although Faitlovitch stated he was fully aware of the magnitude of the problems which confronted the Jewish community at that time, he was convinced that "the comparatively small sums required to realize a program" such as the one he outlined "will have results far out of proportion to the funds that the Jewish community would find it necessary to devote to it." (Faitlovitch, 'Review of the Pro-Falasha Work,' p.4).

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<sup>222</sup> In 1939, Faitlovitch wrote that "owing to the present circumstances I am compelled to relinquish my activities in Abyssinia, that I personally am no more in conditions to do much even in America in favour of the Falashas and that he [Viterbo] ought for the time being to take my place in the Pro-Falasha movement. I insisted on the fact that American Jewry is heavily taxed and over charged in consequence of the terrible calamities befallen on the Jews in Europe and that therefore we in America are no more in position to lead alone the Pro-Falasha movement, especially now when the political conditions render impossible our work in Abyssinia. I told my friends in Italy to be their duty, in spite of all their difficulties at present, to take now the lead of the rescue work for their coreligionists and compatriotes (sic) in Abyssinia." (Faitlovitch to Reit, Chairman of the American Pro-Falasha Committee, 9 May 1939, FC no.127, p.2).

## CHAPTER 4

### FAITLOVITCH'S PROGRAMMES FOR THE FALASHAS

Having examined the chronology of events concerning Faitlovitch and his work for and on behalf of the Falashas, it is now appropriate to analyse his actual programmes in more detail.

#### Education<sup>1</sup>

As mentioned previously and as was seen in the chronology, education and Jewish instruction, in particular, formed a central part of Faitlovitch's proposed programme for the Falashas. It was his understanding that in order to solve the problems of the Falashas it was essential to assist them in educating their children in a Jewish manner. He therefore realised that the first stage of his programme should be the establishment of schools in Ethiopia.<sup>2</sup>

At first, Faitlovitch considered an area in the district of Dämbeya as the most appropriate location for the school. He believed that a school in this area would be quite influential in bringing about the realisation of his aims as, firstly, there was a large number of Falashas who were living in the vicinity. Secondly, and more importantly for

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<sup>1</sup> See E. Trevisan-Semi, 'The Educational Activities of Ya'akob Faitlovitch in Ethiopia (1904-1924)', *Pe'amim*, volume 58, Winter 1994, pp.86-97.

<sup>2</sup> M. Wurmbrand, 'The People of Israel and The Falashas,' conclusion to Faitlovitch, *Journey*, pp.145-163.

Faitlovitch, the Province of Dämbeya was only a five day journey from the frontier of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, "[une] distance qui peut permettre d'avoir des relations continues avec le monde extérieur."<sup>3</sup>

In 1912, a small school was established in Dämbeya under the direction of Gété Ermeyas. The subjects studied at this "elementary school" were Jewish History and Religion and the religious customs of the Falashas, together with a number of elementary courses in secular subjects, including "the language of Abyssinia."<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, Faitlovitch was adamant that if the cause of the Falashas was to be saved, then it was not sufficient to stop at the "elementary school" level but to proceed to organise a Teachers Seminary where the youth could be trained as teachers for their own people. The Seminary, according to Faitlovitch, should be established in the neighbouring Italian Province of Eritrea,<sup>5</sup> whose teachers would be graduates of the school in Dämbeya.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Faitlovitch to the President of the society 'Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden,' 3 April 1907, FC no.94. Faitlovitch wanted the school to be open to pupils of both sexes and also to converted Falashas who wished to enter.

<sup>4</sup> Faitlovitch to unknown, 29 January 1915, FC no.100.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Faitlovitch to H. Schneiderman, Assistant Secretary to the American Jewish Committee, 4 January 1921, p.7, FC no.100.

Faitlovitch wanted to establish a school in Eritrea as it was only a three or four days' journey from the Falasha settlements in Tigre.<sup>7</sup> He declared that the Falashas in this area were "more than their brethren in other parts of Abyssinia in an utmost deplorable state of spiritual degradation and exposed to sink to the low moral level of their neighbours and to be gradually but completely absorbed by them." Nearly twenty years following the commencement of his work amongst the Falashas, Faitlovitch stated that the Tigrean Falashas had remained "untouched by the activities of our schoolwork in the interior" and "[had] not ... even been ... affected by my propaganda."<sup>8</sup>

Faitlovitch admitted that he had in fact, during his previous expeditions to Ethiopia, only visited the Falasha communities in Tigre briefly and had never stayed for any significant amount of time, as he had done in the provinces of Amhara. Furthermore, his preceding three booklets published for the Falashas had only been printed in Amharic and not in Tigrinya, and finally, none of the boys he had

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<sup>7</sup> Faitlovitch claimed in 1921 that there had been a fairly large immigration of Falashas to Tigre during the preceding years from different provinces of Amhara, due to their rather precarious situation at the time in Ethiopia. (see C. Rosen, 'Similarities and Differences between the Beta Israel of Gondar and Tigre,' *Pe'amim*, volume 33, 1987, pp.93-104). However, Faitlovitch also stated that "some of them declared me as [a] motive of their establishment in Tigre to be in this anxious time nearer to the Holy Land." (Faitlovitch to Schneiderman, 4 January 1921, p.9, FC no.100).

<sup>8</sup> Faitlovitch to E. Frisch, Acting Chairman, American Pro-Falasha Committee, 22 June 1923, p.5, FC no.99.

taken abroad had originated from Tigre.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, since the Tigrean Falashas spoke a different language and were "isolated ... from their coreligionists in the central and western provinces," the only "efficacious way to do something for their regeneration" was the establishment of a school in Eritrea.<sup>10</sup> He was particularly interested in the small town of Addi-Ugri which was about sixty kilometres south of Asmara and fifty kilometres from the Abyssinian border. He selected this location as a) the climate in this area of Eritrea was most comfortable; b) it was also inhabited by a few "Jews from Arabia"; and c) it had less contact with "the corruption of ... modern civilisation" than Asmara.<sup>11</sup>

Faitlovitch also intended to establish a trade (craft) section in the school which he asserted would eventually allow the Falashas to support the institute by themselves and would also improve their economic and social conditions.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.8. Although Asmara had a Jewish community and synagogue and could, to some extent, fulfil Faitlovitch's requirements, he felt compelled to reject it outright as a possible location for a "Jewish school." Faitlovitch believed that a long stay in the area would be "more hurtful than profitable for their humanitarian and religious education." (Ibid.) Note: Faitlovitch's ambivalent attitude towards modern civilisation.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.9.

He also planned to establish a school in Addis Ababa which he considered to be of "great importance and very useful" for the Falashas.<sup>13</sup> It would, he stated, "be a very efficacious expedient to solve the Falasha problem."<sup>14</sup> In the capital, the Falashas would, he hoped, come into contact with the "Arabian Jews" of Yemen and Aden who Faitlovitch considered to be "a strong support in their Jewish regeneration"<sup>15</sup> and perhaps also in their "economical and social situation."<sup>16</sup> He not only wanted a "Jewish school" in Addis Ababa to attract the Falashas from the interior<sup>17</sup> but also endeavoured "to bring back to Judaism" the T'äbibans<sup>18</sup> and "the many thousands" of

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<sup>13</sup> Faitlovitch to Adler, 19 December 1920, FC no.141.

<sup>14</sup> Faitlovitch to Schneiderman, 4 January 1921, FC no.100. Faitlovitch considered Addis Ababa to be a "very proper place for an Abyssinian Jewish centre." (Ibid.)

<sup>15</sup> Faitlovitch to Adler, 19 December 1920, FC no.141. Faitlovitch believed that contact with "the coreligionists from Arabia" would have a "wholesome effect for the revival and strengthening of the Judaism in Abyssinia." (Faitlovitch to Schneiderman, 4 January 1921, FC no.100).

<sup>16</sup> Faitlovitch to Adler, 19 December 1920, FC no.141. It would also appear that Faitlovitch planned to establish schools in areas where European and Oriental Jews lived. The aim was to oppose the stereotypes of the Falashas which were common among Western Jews. (M. Squires and Yona Bogale, 'Tamrat Imanuél,' no date, Ben Zvi Archives (unpublished notes).

<sup>17</sup> Faitlovitch to Schneiderman, 4 January 1921, p.3, FC no.100. Faitlovitch believed that "the mere existence of a Jewish community in the capital of the empire" would, most probably, attract many Falashas from the interior.

<sup>18</sup> Faitlovitch mentioned this people in his book *Journey to the Falashas*. He believed that a further inquiry of the T'äbibans would be of great importance to understand the history of the Falashas as he also considered them to be "a Jewish sect." Indeed, Faitlovitch wrote that they practised many of the same customs as the Falashas and



Christian Falashas and their descendants who he claimed had been living for decades in the southern provinces of the Ethiopian empire.<sup>19</sup>

For those Falashas who would not be able to travel the distance to study at the school, Faitlovitch considered "a centre of activity" in Addis Ababa as a way "to keep up the connection with the Falashas in the interior." He planned to use the "trained native teachers" who graduated from the Addis Ababa school as teachers for Falashas in the interior as he realised that expeditions were too expensive and he was no longer physically able to travel around the difficult terrain of Ethiopia.<sup>20</sup>

Faitlovitch further intended to establish a "Jewish Trade School" in Addis Ababa in order to teach the Falashas "the professions which they exercise in their country and to teach them new ones which have been or can be introduced in Abyssinia."<sup>21</sup> He believed that once some Falashas had

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perhaps, up until a century before his arrival, "they were still in contact with their brethren in the western provinces of Abyssinia." (Faitlovitch to Schneiderman, 4 January 1921, p.5, FC no.100). See R. Pankhurst, 'The Ballä Ejj Community of Shäwa,' in Kaplan et al., (eds.), *Between Africa and Zion*, pp.131-152.

<sup>19</sup> Faitlovitch to Schneiderman, 4 January 1921, p.10, FC no.100. Faitlovitch called these 'Falasha-Christians' 'Falasha-marranoes' elsewhere. (Faitlovitch to Frisch, 22 June 1923, p.9, FC no.99).

<sup>20</sup> Faitlovitch to Adler, 14 June 1921, FC no.99.

<sup>21</sup> Faitlovitch to Schneiderman, 4 January 1921, p.3, FC no.100. Faitlovitch believed that Addis Ababa would become a base for a large number of trained workmen and artisans.

become "acquainted with .... modern culture," and their economic and social conditions had improved, they would be able to support the school themselves.<sup>22</sup>

While designing the educational programme for the Falasha school in Addis Ababa, Faitlovitch took various factors into account. Firstly, he wanted the school to be a "modern educational institute worthy of the Jewish and American name."<sup>23</sup> Secondly, although he admitted that the school in the capital could not be compared "with an institution of that kind in America,"<sup>24</sup> he believed that he had to set the standard of the school according to European norms in Ethiopia. This was in order to prevent potential pupils being attracted to the missionary camp.<sup>25</sup> Finally, according to the headmaster of the school, Tamrat Imanuél,

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He assumed that, after training, the Falashas would be able to earn a livelihood while at the same time, they would remain in closer contact "with the outside Jewish and civilised world." (Faitlovitch to E. Frisch, 22 June 1923, p.10, FC no.99). Furthermore, since "les Falachas ... constituent depuis des siècles presque les seuls artisans de ce pays: forgerons, maçons, tisserands, selliers, potiers, menuisiers, armuriers etc ... [ils] sont susceptibles, plus que tous autres ici, de recevoir avec profit l'instruction d'une école professionnelle." (Faitlovitch to S. Levi, Président du Comité Central de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle, 7 May 1926, FC no.100).

<sup>22</sup> Faitlovitch to Schneiderman, 4 January 1921, p.4, FC no.100.

<sup>23</sup> Faitlovitch to Frisch, 22 June 1923, p.10, FC no.99.

<sup>24</sup> Faitlovitch to Frisch, 15 January 1924, FC no.99.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Nevertheless, in January 1924, Faitlovitch considered the school to be "only a very small miniature of the different missionary institutions established in Addis Ababa." (Ibid.)

the programme was designed according to that of a Western 'Talmud-Torah' school but "con leggiera modificazione richiesta dall'ambiente e dalla mentalità dei frequentatori."<sup>26</sup>

According to Faitlovitch, one of the chief purposes of the educational programme was to "enlarge and develop the religious knowledge of the Falashas by bringing them in contact with the Hebrew Bible with which they [were] unfamiliar." Therefore, the subject that was considered the most important one to be taught at the school was Hebrew grammar and reading.<sup>27</sup> The additional subjects taught at the beginning were: Judaism, Amharic - reading and writing, Ge'ez, Elementary Arithmetic, History and Geography. In 1925, French or Italian lessons were offered to the advanced students and the Hebrew studies were supplemented with a class in traditional Hebrew literature, including traditional liturgy.<sup>28</sup> Finally, it would appear that

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<sup>26</sup> Tamrat Imanuél to the director of the Italian journal *Israele*, February 1926, FC no.99. The purpose of the educational programme at the Addis Ababa school was, according to Tamrat Imanuél, "sviluppare la coscienza ebraica degli allievi." (Ibid.)

<sup>27</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Work of the American Pro-Falasha Committee 1923-27,' p.2, FC no.113. Those pupils who had had the advantage of some preliminary instruction before their arrival to the school were able to study advanced Hebrew. (Interview with Mängestu Elyas, 28 September 1995).

<sup>28</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Work of the American Pro-Falasha Committee,' p.5. See also Tamrat Imanuél to Rabbi Rosenblum, 1 September 1933, p.4, FC no.142 regarding subjects taught at the school.

lessons were also given on hygiene and sanitation.<sup>29</sup>

It was Faitlovitch's intention in fact to establish "in every large centre of Falasha communities a school with Jewish teachers from abroad."<sup>30</sup> Gété Ermeyas had already urged him to send more educated teachers to assist the development of school work in the interior. Gété had recommended "the organisation of a few more stations in many large communities of the different Amhara provinces and to have everywhere, besides an Abyssinian, also a Hebrew teacher."<sup>31</sup> Faitlovitch believed that the Falasha Debterahs and Priests should also be used to assist the educational programme in the interior. After having undergone training, Faitlovitch hoped that they would devote themselves to the education of the young.<sup>32</sup>

By 1923-24, this would appear to have been the case since, according to Faitlovitch, "the efforts of the assistants were supplemented through the Debterahs or the local priests." Indeed, one of the valuable services rendered by the Debterahs, was the teaching of the classical Ge'ez, thus "making it possible for them [the Falashas] to become

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<sup>29</sup> American Pro-Falasha Committee, 'Twenty Fifth Anniversary of an Enterprise to Save Jews for Judaism,' no date but approx. 1929, FC no.142.

<sup>30</sup> Faitlovitch to A. Lucas, Secretary to the Joint Distribution Committee, 31 January 1921, FC no.100.

<sup>31</sup> Faitlovitch to Frisch, 22 June 1923, p.7, FC no.99.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.8 and Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum of The Pro-Falasha Movement,' p.4, FC no.93.

acquainted with their own sacred literature and that of the Abyssinians." This was, in Faitlovitch's opinion, "an important phase of our program of developing the Falashas, religiously and educationally."<sup>33</sup>

### Distribution of Literature

As we have seen, Faitlovitch considered the distribution of Bibles and books on Judaism in Amharic and Ge'ez, together with the establishment of a school, as the most essential part of his educational programme for the Falashas.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, from its inception, he urged Jewish leaders around the world to assist with the cost of translating and publishing religious and historical books that were used in Jewish schools throughout Europe.<sup>35</sup> According to Faitlovitch, the Falasha leaders drew his attention to the shortage of Bibles and books on Judaism which were essential for the education of the youth.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, a supply of such literature was imperative if the efforts of the missionaries, who used the circulation of Amharic Bibles as a principle tactic of conversion, were to

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<sup>33</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Work of The American Pro-Falasha Committee In Abyssinia,' p.4, FC no.113.

<sup>34</sup> Faitlovitch, *Journey*, p.29.

<sup>35</sup> See for example, Faitlovitch to President of the Society 'Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden,' 8 January 1907, FC no.94.

<sup>36</sup> Faitlovitch, *Journey*, p.88.

be combatted.<sup>37</sup> Faitlovitch considered the distribution of these "expensive presents"<sup>38</sup> together with other "books designed to puzzle their minds" as "the reason why the missionaries have succeeded in their work."<sup>39</sup> Therefore, an important counter-missionary strategy was to "diffuse Jewish edification [sic] literature among the Falashas in their language."<sup>40</sup>

The main literature which Faitlovitch recommended for distribution amongst the Falashas was a "Jewish translation of the Pentateuch, Psalms, text books of Jewish history, ethics"<sup>41</sup> and a Jewish calendar.<sup>42</sup> He also intended to disseminate among them information about Jews and Judaism of other countries at that time.<sup>43</sup> The latter took the form

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Although he claimed the Falashas realised that the acceptance of missionary material would be a precursor to conversion to Christianity, they stated that they had no other way of obtaining religious literature. (Ibid., p.88).

<sup>38</sup> It should be noted that Faitlovitch viewed these Bibles as a great attraction "for uncultivated peoples." (Faitlovitch, 'The Black Jews,' p.13).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Faitlovitch to The American Pro-Falasha Committee, 19 August 1934, p.5, AJDC Archives, New York, file no. 433.

<sup>41</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Pro-Falasha Movement,' p.4, FC no.93.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.21. Faitlovitch hoped to print a calendar, "covering a number of years, in the Abyssinian and Hebrew languages, with explanations of the festivals and fasts." (Ibid.) Faitlovitch believed that one of the most pressing requests from the Falashas was these calendars, a shortage of which had caused some confusion concerning the dates of the festivals. (Faitlovitch, *Journey*, footnote 12, p.179).

<sup>43</sup> Faitlovitch, 'A Review of the Pro-Falasha Work,' 28 May 1935, p.3, FC no.113.

of five booklets written by Faitlovitch in Amharic and Ge'ez and distributed widely in Ethiopia on five separate occasions. The aim of these booklets was to develop a "Jewish self-consciousness" among the Falashas and also to counteract Christian missionary activity.<sup>44</sup> They were, in his opinion, "the best expedient of propaganda amongst them" as they were able to "reach everyone, every community in the most ... remote provinces." It was in fact Faitlovitch's intention that the distribution of these "Epistles" or "homiletical literature" would eventually replace, to some extent, his personal tours.<sup>45</sup>

The first booklet, entitled 'The Falasha Epistle,'<sup>46</sup> was published in Rome<sup>47</sup> in 1908 and included a message to the Falashas from forty-four Rabbis from different countries. The Rabbis instructed the Falashas to remain steadfast to their religion and not to pay attention to the missionaries who claimed that all the Jews of the world had been converted.<sup>48</sup> Faitlovitch also promised the Falashas that he would do his utmost to educate their children so that they

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<sup>44</sup> Faitlovitch to Frisch, 22 March 1923, p.3, FC no.99.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>46</sup> I am indebted to Anbäsa Täfärra of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for translating all five booklets into English.

<sup>47</sup> All five booklets were printed in Rome.

<sup>48</sup> Faitlovitch stated that Jews around the world observed the commandments of God and still prayed in Hebrew. Furthermore, they had in their possession the Torah and Talmud and books on law and history of the Jewish people which were written in Hebrew.

would be able to understand their religion better.

The second booklet was entitled 'An Epistle of Fraternity' and was published in 1912. It included a letter Faitlovitch wrote to Emperor Menilek II concerning the hardship experienced by the Falashas. In this booklet, he also discussed the Falashas' illiteracy<sup>49</sup> which was for him "a point of concern" considering the fact that the Jews are known as "People of the Book." He advised them to educate their children to prevent the demise of their culture and religion and to be prepared even to sacrifice their lives rather than their religion. Finally, he stated that his aim was to unite the Falashas with the Jewish world and not to leave them forgotten and isolated from other Jews.

The third booklet was entitled 'The Epistle of Consolation' and was published in 1915, arriving in Ethiopia unaccompanied by Faitlovitch.<sup>50</sup> In this publication, Faitlovitch discussed the school that was founded in Dämbeya so that the Falasha children "could be educated in the Laws of God." He also called on the Falashas not to despair, despite the difficult conditions, as the "life of Israelites is filled with tribulations." He assured the

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<sup>49</sup> This statement would appear to contradict an earlier one where he wrote that "presque tous les Falachas sont lettrés." (Faitlovitch to an Italian minister, 29 November 1905, p.4, FC no.24). It would also, to some extent, negate the effectiveness of the distribution of such booklets.

<sup>50</sup> Faitlovitch was prevented from travelling to Ethiopia throughout the duration of World War One.



Falashas that they were "the chosen people" and thousands of fellow Jews would help them attain their goal.

The fourth booklet was entitled 'The Epistle of Peace' and published in 1928. Faitlovitch advised the Falashas in this publication to observe all of God's commandments and not to copy a culture which was not their own.<sup>51</sup> Hproposed that married couples should live peacefully and raise their children spiritually and intellectually. Furthermore, Faitlovitch advised the Falashas to lower their rate of divorce in order to reduce the numbers of illegitimate children born. In short, he stated that the Falashas should lead a holy life as they were the chosen people and should demonstrate this fact by deed and not just by word.

In this booklet, Faitlovitch went on to instruct the Falashas of the rules that were formulated by "our forefathers" to "serve as guidance for our life." He stressed that in order to lead a Jewish way of life it was necessary to observe all the commandments of the Old Testament and not just to select those which were easier to observe.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Faitlovitch claimed that if the Falashas copied what the gentiles did, their act would be similar to that of animals and hasten its downfall.

<sup>52</sup> Faitlovitch quoted unnamed Talmud scholars who stated "you must pay equal attention both to minor and major commandments because you do not know the reward of each commandment."

Faitlovitch's fifth and final booklet was published in 1936 and was entitled 'Epistle of the Bearer of Good News.' It opened with an account of the enemies who tried, throughout Jewish history, to destroy the Jewish people. Although, he noted, the Ethiopian Jews had also been persecuted throughout history, Faitlovitch conceded that "nowadays you [Falashas] live peacefully thanks to reforms and religious freedom initiated by Emperor Menilek II" and continued by Haile Sellassie. Indeed, he wrote that the Emperor strove to spread education among all his subjects, whom he considered to be of equal status. The rest of the publication contains copies of letters between Haile Sellassie and Faitlovitch in which Faitlovitch discussed how the lives of the Falashas could be improved.<sup>53</sup>

Along with the booklets and Bibles that Faitlovitch prepared for the Falashas, he also considered it necessary to publish literature to educate world Jewry about the Falashas' existence. Therefore, he planned to publish some of the Falashas' manuscripts which had come into his possession during his expeditions.<sup>54</sup> It was his hope that "the publishing of these books" would help with the task he

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<sup>53</sup> This will be discussed in the section dealing with Faitlovitch's political agenda.

<sup>54</sup> Faitlovitch had in his possession "mostly hagiographic and homiletic writings, a few books of the Bible, some paraphrastic portions of and short commentaries on the Pentateuch, texts of daily and festival prayers and of other subjects of religious content, which in parts throw some light on the shady and enigmatic points of the history of this mysterious and interesting peculiar people." (Faitlovitch, 'Preface,' p.11, FC no.42).

had been endeavouring to achieve for nearly half a century. This was "to stimulate the western world to take up fraternal assistance action on behalf of the Falashas in order to redress the awful distressed situation of these Abyssinian coreligionists."<sup>55</sup>

However, despite Faitlovitch's intention to publish the majority of his manuscripts,<sup>56</sup> it should be noted that only a few ever appeared in print. These included *Mota Muse (La Mort de Moïse)*, *Texte éthiopien avec traduction en hébreu et français*, (Paris, 1906), *Proverbes Abyssins*, traduits, expliqués et annotés, (Paris, 1907),<sup>57</sup> *Nouveaux Proverbes Abyssins*, Reprint of *Rivista Studi Orientali*, (Rome, 1910), *Versi Abissini*, Reprint of *Giornale della Societa Asiatica*, (Florence, 1912). Perhaps the most noteworthy of Faitlovitch's publications was the 1936 translation of the book of Enoch from Ge'ez into Hebrew.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.13. Although the majority of manuscripts in Faitlovitch's possession were incomplete, he realised that many of them were "in many aspects of some importance to the linguistic and literary studies of Abyssinia in general and particularly valuable to a somewhat better knowledge of the Jews in that country" (ibid., p.12), including their "historic religious development." (p.13).

<sup>56</sup> In the Faitlovitch collection, there appears a draft Preface in English, (to which I have already referred), to what would appear to belong to the first in a series of publications of hagiographic texts that Faitlovitch had collated over the years. (FC no. 42). Sadly, this remained unpublished.

<sup>57</sup> This was the subject of Faitlovitch's doctoral dissertation.

<sup>58</sup> Faitlovitch's Curriculum Vitae and List of Publications, FC no.139.

The majority of his other publications included reports that appeared in newspapers and journals, many of which I have already referred to in this chapter.

### Education Abroad

Another important part of Faitlovitch's educational programme was the sending of Falasha pupils overseas to study. On several occasions, he stressed that the education of young Falashas abroad was "one of the best and most efficacious expedients to rescue and strengthen the Judaism in Abyssinia and to bring the Falashas close in contact with the rest of Jewry."<sup>59</sup>

As we have seen in the early stages of Faitlovitch's programme for the Falashas, he was eager "to send some young Falashas to institutes in Palestine where they would receive preparatory training for advanced studies."<sup>60</sup> This was so that "they may in the future serve as teachers in the school [for Falashas in Ethiopia]."<sup>61</sup> Faitlovitch's first two pupils, Gété Ermeyas and Tamrat Imanuél, on their return to Ethiopia, were both instrumental in the establishment of the educational programme for the Falashas.

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<sup>59</sup> Faitlovitch to Adler, 19 December 1920, p.3, FC no.141, and Faitlovitch to Frisch, 26 August 1923, FC no. 99.

<sup>60</sup> Faitlovitch to the President of the Society 'Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden,' 8 January 1907, FC no.94.

<sup>61</sup> Faitlovitch, *Journey*, p.31.

Faitlovitch was convinced of the benefit that would accrue from "the most promising" of young Falasha boys<sup>62</sup> being sent abroad to study in Palestine and Europe<sup>63</sup> both for themselves and the rest of the Falashas. As well as being educated in Jewish and secular subjects, Faitlovitch intended that each of his pupils would return as "a good Jew and a perfect cultured man" who would return to Ethiopia to be "a real pioneer of our ideals amongst his people in his country."<sup>64</sup> It was for this reason that Faitlovitch wanted the Falasha students to be looked after by traditional, cultured and respectable European Jewish families.<sup>65</sup>

Faitlovitch wanted some of his students who were sent abroad, once sufficiently educated and cultured, to study at a University with a view to training for liberal professions. In 1926, Faitlovitch noted that "le

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<sup>62</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Review of the Pro-Falasha Work,' 28 May 1935, p.3, FC no.113.

<sup>63</sup> Although Faitlovitch initially viewed Palestine as the most suitable country for the education of the Falashas (Faitlovitch to Adler, 19 December 1920, FC no.141), the majority of Falashas who were sent abroad did in fact study in European countries. In 1923, he declared that those Falashas who studied only in Palestine did not make as much progress in their studies "as their colleagues in Europe." Faitlovitch concluded that the conditions in Palestine at that time were not conducive to the Falashas' education. (Faitlovitch to Frisch, 22 March 1923, p.7, FC no.99).

<sup>64</sup> Faitlovitch to The American Pro-Falasha Executive Committee, 26 December 1922, p.6, FC no.127.

<sup>65</sup> Faitlovitch to Frisch, 26 August 1923, FC no.99. For Faitlovitch, this was an integral part of the Falashas' education abroad.

développement actuel du pays nécessite la formation de professeurs, avocats, médecins, architectes etc." He therefore wanted the Falashas studying abroad to take advantage of "cette occasion pour améliorer leur situation sociale et économique et laissons leur honneur et l'avantage d'être parmi les premiers indigènes à exercer des professions libérales dans ce pays."<sup>66</sup> Faitlovitch considered this development as "indispensable" for the creation of an educated class of Falashas, capable of guiding the Jewish community. According to Faitlovitch, it was also essential in order to gain respect for the Falashas from the local Ethiopian authorities<sup>67</sup> through their "[participation] in the progress and modernisation of the country" at a time when Ethiopia was "laying a basis for Western civilisation."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Faitlovitch to Sylvain Levi, 7 May 1926, FC no.99. In 1923, for example, Faitlovitch hoped that if Hezqeyas Finhas was to continue to study without interruption, both secular and religious subjects, he would become "the first physician-Rabbi in his country." This, he claimed was his purpose of education for this boy and indeed, other boys who went to study in Europe. (Faitlovitch to the American Pro-Falasha Executive Committee, 21 January 1923, FC no.99).

<sup>67</sup> Faitlovitch to Levi, 7 May 1926, FC no.99. Faitlovitch wrote that "le caractère abyssin, qui s'apparente d'assez près au caractère sémite, a, au même degré que celui-ci le respect de l'instruction; il est bien certain que de simple contre-maîtres seuls ne peuvent lui imposer ce respect. Ici plus que partout ailleurs en Orient, une élite intellectuelle en impose aux dirigeants du pays." (Ibid.)

<sup>68</sup> Faitlovitch, *Igeret Ha-Mevasser (The Epistle of Good News)*, (Rome, 1936), (in Amharic), translated by Anbäsa Täfärä.

It would appear that Faitlovitch sent young Falashas abroad to serve an additional purpose for his educational programme. As I mentioned previously, Faitlovitch considered Western Jewry as a significant partner in his scheme to regenerate the Falashas. However, he realised that he would first have to introduce the Falashas to Jewish communities around the world before they would be willing to support his project. He therefore attempted to send certain Falashas, who had received a preliminary Jewish education in Ethiopia, to various countries as a type of educational emissary to world Jewry to demonstrate that the Falashas were Jewish and worth saving.

For most Jews, including those who were already collaborating with Faitlovitch, these 'representatives' of the Falashas provided them with the first opportunity to meet the mysterious 'black Jews of Abyssinia.' Therefore, in 1928 Faitlovitch was "delighted to learn" that Rabbi Weiss of the American Pro-Falasha committee had finally come into contact in Vienna with "a living sample of the work" with which the Rabbi had been involved for so many years. Faitlovitch hoped that this would complete "[his] Falasha education for the benefit of our movement."<sup>69</sup> This

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<sup>69</sup> Faitlovitch to J.M. Weiss, secretary of the American Pro-Falasha Committee, 12 October 1928, FC no.127. Weiss stated afterwards that he "had the privilege" of meeting his first Falasha, in the person of a boy of fifteen, who was studying to be a dentist. When Weiss asked him what attitude he would take toward Christian patients, the boy assured him that "his point of view was more modern and that the idea of non-contact with Christians was not accepted by him." (Rabbi J.M. Weiss, 'The Origin of The

was also the purpose of Tamrat Imanuél's visit to the United States in 1930, when he became the first Falasha to visit the country. He travelled around Jewish communities in the United States to "present ... a living example of [his] far-away brethren of Ethiopia"<sup>70</sup> to American Jews.

Therefore, the education of the Falashas abroad served a dual purpose; a) to educate those who had been sent overseas in secular and Jewish subjects to train them as teachers so that on their return they could help "bring their [the Falashas'] religious observance into accord with the Judaism of the modern world"<sup>71</sup> and b) to educate world Jewry about the Falashas.

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Falashas,' no date but approx. 1929, FC no. 142). This resulting consequence of the Falashas' encounter with the Western world will be examined in the next chapter.

<sup>70</sup> Address delivered by Tamrat Imanuél, 1930, FC no.137. Elsewhere, it was written that Tamrat Imanuél was brought to America as he "personifies in himself the best argument for the work to which Dr. Faitlovitch has dedicated himself during the past twenty-six years of his life. Endowed with European culture and traditional Hebrew learning ... [he] represents what may be accomplished for the Falashas under the proper guidance and training." (Goldstein, 'American Pro-Falasha Committee Chairman's Report Covering the Year 1930,' 10 March 1931, FC no.93). Faitlovitch and Tamrat Imanuél also paid a visit to a Black Jewish community in Harlem "to find out if they were Falashas" and possibly hoping for a ready commitment to the Falasha cause. Nevertheless, "Dr. Faitlovitch left them with the view that they were 'misled.'" (H.M. Brotz, *The Black Jews of Harlem*, (New York, 1964), p.49. See also K.J. King, 'Some Notes on Arnold J. Ford and New World Black attitudes to Ethiopia,' *J.E.S.*, vol.10, (1), Jan 1972, pp. 81-86).

<sup>71</sup> Weiss, 'The Origin of The Falashas,' approx. 1929, FC no. 142.



### Distribution of Medical Aid

One of Faitlovitch's other primary concerns was the poor sanitary conditions prevalent in Ethiopia and the fact that apart from Addis Ababa, there were no physicians in the country. Moreover, he considered the remedies which the natives employed in case of sickness were "poor and very primitive."<sup>72</sup> Therefore, according to Faitlovitch, whenever an epidemic appeared in the country many thousands of the inhabitants perished due to a lack of medical treatment.<sup>73</sup> It was his intention to improve this situation by bringing medication and physicians to Ethiopia.

Furthermore, Faitlovitch believed that by distributing drugs to "Jews and gentiles," it would "in many ways" facilitate his mission among the Falashas.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, alongside his endeavour to improve sanitary conditions for the Falashas as part of his welfare programme, the distribution of drugs served a two-fold purpose.

Firstly, the distribution of drugs was used as a method of attracting Falashas to Faitlovitch's educational programme. Secondly, as the distribution of drugs attracted hundreds

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<sup>72</sup> Faitlovitch to Lucas, 31 January 1921, p.4, FC no.100.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Faitlovitch to Lucas, 31 January 1921, AJDC Archives, New York, p.5, file no.109.

of non-Jews as well as Jews<sup>75</sup> wherever they were dispensed, Faitlovitch was provided with the opportunity to discuss the situation of the Falashas with the former. Moreover, according to Faitlovitch, as "many chiefs and among them several [of] high authority" had "visited us, received medication and been cured by us," it gave him "the opportunity to gain the sympathy" for his "Jewish and humanitarian task."<sup>76</sup> Faitlovitch believed that this "would help the Falasha cause and favour the development" of his work in Ethiopia by "raising the prestige" of the Falashas and the "honour of the Jewish name in general."<sup>77</sup>

#### Faitlovitch's Dealings with Political Figures.

Faitlovitch believed that the key to the amelioration of the Falashas' political and social situation lay with the local and higher Ethiopian authorities. If a school was to be constructed or literature or medical aid was to be distributed, he realised that permission would first have to be obtained from the relevant authorities.

Furthermore, Faitlovitch understood that the responsibility

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<sup>75</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Pro-Falasha Movement,' approx. 1921/22, p.14, FC no.93.

<sup>76</sup> Faitlovitch to Lucas, 31 January 1921, AJDC Archives, New York, p.5, file no.109. Elsewhere, Faitlovitch stated that by "aiding also the non-Jewish population" it would "bring honour to the Jewish name and to American Jewry in particular." (Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Falashas,' p.4, FC no.114).

<sup>77</sup> Faitlovitch to Lucas, 31 January 1921, AJDC Archives, New York, p.5, file no.109.

for the Falashas' condition in Ethiopia lay ultimately with the emperor and if their predicament was to be improved, then he would have to be approached directly. In 1908, on his second expedition, Faitlovitch travelled to Addis Ababa and was granted an audience with Emperor Menilek II.<sup>78</sup> Although Faitlovitch expressed his gratitude that the Falashas were living under the emperor's protection and were granted freedom of religion, he maintained that there were those who often accused the Falashas of appalling crimes. For example, it was alleged that they were 'buda,' devourers of human flesh who at night turned into hyenas and preyed upon their neighbours livestock.<sup>79</sup> Faitlovitch pleaded that these accusations caused untold suffering for the Falashas, since the local authorities incarcerated many of them and confiscated their property.

Faitlovitch further asserted that in areas where the Falashas engaged in blacksmithing or building, the men would sometimes be led in chains to the city and forced to build houses and churches. This would result in many women

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<sup>78</sup> It would appear that Faitlovitch was granted this audience on the pretext that the Emperor was to be informed of the former's research expedition. Indeed, Faitlovitch presented to Menilek several essays on Ethiopia that he had written including one on Ethiopian proverbs. The Emperor was also presented with a Hebrew translation of 'Mota Muse,' which led him to ask "to hear the language of his fathers." Faitlovitch used this opportunity to discuss the issue of the Falashas. (Faitlovitch, *Journey*, pp. 111-112).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., pp. 112-113. On 'buda' see R. Pankhurst, *A Social History of Ethiopia: The Northern and Central Highlands from Early Medieval Times to the Rise of Emperor Téwodros II*, Addis Ababa, 1992, pp. 203-204, 223, 263-264.

and children being left without means of sustenance and the men having to transgress the Sabbath.<sup>80</sup>

In reply to Faitlovitch's appeal, Emperor Menilek promised to rectify the situation by issuing an order to stop the maltreatment of the Falashas.<sup>81</sup>

In 1920, six years after the death of Menilek II, Faitlovitch reported that the situation of the Falashas had deteriorated again.<sup>82</sup> He therefore felt it was necessary to "inform the central Ethiopian government ... of the conditions and to ask for some social and political [and religious]<sup>83</sup> ameliorations."<sup>84</sup> In addition, if the educational work in the interior was to be developed and expanded and permission granted for a school in Addis Ababa, Faitlovitch perceived that it was of great

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<sup>80</sup> Faitlovitch, *Journey*, p.113. See also Faitlovitch, *An Epistle of Fraternity*, (Rome, 1912).

<sup>81</sup> Faitlovitch, *Journey*, p.114. Faitlovitch believed that "his words had touched the heart" of the Emperor.

<sup>82</sup> Faitlovitch to Schneiderman, 4 January 1921, p.1, FC no.100. He wrote that since the Emperor's death, the political situation had taken a different course, which was not quite favourable to the Jews, placing them in "an untoward and insecure situation."

<sup>83</sup> Faitlovitch wrote that "through vexation and intimidation a large number of converted Falashas, whose ardent desire is to join the paternal community, are afraid to come back to Judaism and therefore compelled to live under Christian appearance." He therefore intended "to deliver our Abyssinian brethren from the religious oppression" by informing the highest authorities of the country, imploring them to carry out the religious liberty act ordained by emperor Menilek II. (Ibid., pp. 2-3).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.1.

importance that the central government should be informed of his activities and the necessary permission and facilities obtained. This was to avoid disturbances from the local chiefs and native Christian missionaries.<sup>85</sup>

To this end, in late December 1920, Faitlovitch met with Ras Tāfāri to inform him of the conditions of the Falashas. He requested Ras Tāfāri to interdict "the abuses and arbitrariness of the local authorities," emphasising the "interest that the Jews of the whole world bear in favour of their co-religionists" in Ethiopia and the resulting advantages for the country that would ensue from a Pro-Falasha campaign. The Regent promised him that he would look into the matter and also suggested to Faitlovitch to prepare a statement on the subject.<sup>86</sup>

On 9 March 1921, Faitlovitch once again met with Ras Tāfāri and presented a statement to him. This statement gave "an accurate and clear view of the dreadful situation of the Falashas" and recommended the following "necessary measures to ameliorate their political and social conditions."<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.2. According to Faitlovitch, due to the missionaries' failure to attract Falashas, they had now adopted alternative methods such as disparaging and calumniating the Falashas and the "work undertaken for their Jewish and cultural revival" to the local and regional authorities.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>87</sup> Faitlovitch to Lucas, 10 March 1921, p.1, AJDC Archives, New York, file no.109. See also Faitlovitch, *Epistle of the Bearer of Good News*.

1) The government should prevent local authorities from subjecting artisans and craftsmen to forced labour.<sup>88</sup>

2) The government ought to pursue the policy of religious freedom proclaimed by Menilek II.<sup>89</sup>

3) The government should also "clarify the intellect of the people ... to enlighten the stunted and veiled minds ... to strive that the populations of Ethiopia understand [one another]."<sup>90</sup>

In his reply to Faitlovitch,<sup>91</sup> Ras Tāfāri assured him that forced labour and the accusation of 'buda' were both punishable offenses. He also promised to protect the Falashas, as they were part of the people of Ethiopia, and to do his utmost to solve their various problems. Finally, he made clear his enthusiasm towards Faitlovitch's scheme

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<sup>88</sup> Faitlovitch believed that Menilek's decree had been violated since specifically, carpenters were forced from their homes to work under terrible conditions. Consequently, their wives and children were made to suffer. (Faitlovitch, *Epistle of the Bearer of Good News*, p.3).

<sup>89</sup> Faitlovitch informed Ras Tāfāri that local chiefs of some areas in which the Falashas were residing were harassing the Falashas in religious matters. Indeed, Faitlovitch stated that they were prevented from observing their "ancestral traditions" and were forced to work on the "Sabbath and Jewish festivals." (Ibid.)

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. Faitlovitch was particularly concerned about the accusation of 'buda' which was used against the Falashas.

<sup>91</sup> The letter was dated April 1924 and can be found in Faitlovitch, *Epistle of the Bearer of Good News*.

of sending students abroad to Europe because of the benefit that Ethiopia would derive from their education.

On 11 May 1926, Faitlovitch once again wrote to Ras Tāfāri and stressed the plight of the artisans which he claimed was not understood by the Regent. He requested that a decree be issued which would prohibit slave labour and allow the Falashas to observe the Sabbath and festivals. He was therefore delighted to learn that on 30 November 1928, such a decree was issued regarding the rights of artisans.<sup>92</sup>

With regards to the local chiefs of areas in which the Falashas lived, Faitlovitch believed that what was needed was to send them occasional gifts in order to achieve protection for his work in Ethiopia. As every chief in the country was "almighty and quasi independent in his territory," Faitlovitch assumed that with these gifts more could be obtained than by letters and decrees from the central government in Addis Ababa.<sup>93</sup> Distribution of medical supplies to local chiefs can indeed be considered

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<sup>92</sup> The decree instructed the artisans' employers to agree upon a payment prior to commencement of work and prohibited a working day to exceed eight hours plus a break of four hours per day.

<sup>93</sup> Faitlovitch to Adler, 14 June 1921, pp.3-4, FC no.99. For example, it would appear that when Faitlovitch met with Ras Gugsa Walé on 1 November 1920 to obtain protection for the school work carried out by Gété Ermeyas and to discuss other problems experienced by the Falashas, he first presented Ras Gugsa with a gift. (Faitlovitch, 'Report Presented to Adler,' p.4, FC no.113).

an example of this idea.

Faitlovitch further believed that "even in the capital the high authorities are accessible to presents and only by this way you are sure to succeed."<sup>94</sup> He believed this to extend beyond material gifts and include assisting the Ethiopian higher authorities whenever and wherever possible. An example of the latter is the instance of the proposed dam that was to be built at Lake Tana, concerning which Faitlovitch outlined the political and environmental problems that would arise from the construction of such a dam.<sup>95</sup>

In addition to Faitlovitch's political dealings with the Ethiopian government, he also became involved with other governments during the course of his campaign. As we have seen in chapter three, they included the Italian, American

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<sup>94</sup> Faitlovitch to Adler, 14 June 1921, p.4, FC no.99. For example on 18 November 1930, Israel Goldstein, the then chairman of the Pro-Falasha Committee, informed Haile Sellassie that in recognition of his "help and interest in the welfare of the Falashas, and on the auspicious occasion" of his coronation, he was to be presented with a miniature sculpture of the Lion of Judah. (Goldstein to Haile Sellassie, 18 November 1930, FC no.124).

<sup>95</sup> Anon., 'The Problem of the Dam,' no date but approx. 1927, FC no. 133. Faitlovitch, posing as a representative of Ras Täfäri, stressed the concern felt by the Regent towards the intrusion of foreign powers into Ethiopia who planned to build this dam. He also claimed that the clergy of various monasteries located on islands in the Lake were opposed to the project as they feared the building of the proposed dam would cause the submergence of the islands. He further used the opportunity to discuss the issue of the Falashas and how he thought the construction of a dam at Lake Tana would affect their lives.



and British governments who were approached in order to obtain foreign protection for Faitlovitch's programme, a protection deemed essential prior to negotiating with the indigenous authorities.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE IMPACT OF FAITLOVITCH'S PROGRAMMES FOR AND ON BEHALF OF THE FALASHAS

In order to portray the results of Faitlovitch's programmes and their impact on Falasha society, it will first be useful to reiterate here his original aims.

- 1) To reform the Falashas' religion to make it conform with normative Judaism.
- 2) To improve the Falashas' religious and political situation.
- 3) To develop their economic, intellectual and social position.
- 4) To combat Christian missionary activity and bring conversions to an end.
- 5) To educate Western Jewry about the Falashas and to encourage their assistance.

In order to interpret the actual results of these expressed aims, a wide variety of sources must be used. These include not only Faitlovitch's writings but missionary sources, governmental documentation, opponents' interpretations and interviews with Falashas. It is only through assessing these other sources that one gains an actual picture of the results and subsequent impact of Faitlovitch's programme for and on behalf of the Falashas.

## The Results of Faitlovitch's Educational Programmes

### Review

The main purpose of Faitlovitch's educational programme was to "enlarge and develop the religious knowledge of the Falashas"<sup>1</sup> along with their general education, in order to raise them to "a high level of Judaism and of culture generally."<sup>2</sup> He believed that the Falashas' "abysmal ignorance" was "the most single impediment to their spiritual and cultural development."<sup>3</sup> He therefore considered education as a "resurrectory force" which would "extract them from the arms of apathy [and] put them back at the surface of a more advanced social state."<sup>4</sup> If provided with Jewish education, Faitlovitch further speculated that the Falashas would "remain Jews" and gradually conform to the standards of modern Judaism.<sup>5</sup> It is thus evident that Faitlovitch hoped that his educational programme would achieve what was, after all, the prime incentive behind his overall programme for the Falashas, namely to regenerate the Falashas' religion to conform with normative Judaism.

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<sup>1</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Work of the American Pro-Falasha Committee in Abyssinia,' FC no.113.

<sup>2</sup> Faitlovitch to Chairman of American Jewish Committee, 14 June 1921, FC no.99.

<sup>3</sup> The American Pro-Falasha Committee, *Romance of the Falashas*, approx. 1938, p.11.

<sup>4</sup> Faitlovitch, *Les Falachas*, p.10.

<sup>5</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Falashas - Presentation to the Chairman and Members of the Falasha Committee,' no date, FC no.142.

In the 1920's Faitlovitch claimed that, as a result of his educational programme among the Falashas, he had achieved the following results-:

1) The establishment of schools for Falashas in Addis Ababa and in the interior.<sup>6</sup>

2) From the Falashas schools in Ethiopia, several young Falashas had emerged, "ayant une formation primaire et quelques uns même une culture supérieure," who were suitable to become teachers for the Falashas.<sup>7</sup>

3) The graduates from these schools, "ayant reçu fortement l'empreinte d'une instruction saine et solide," were distinguishable from other Ethiopians who "trop souvent eux n'ont reçu qu'un vernis superficiel de culture occidentale."<sup>8</sup>

4) Several of the most promising boys had also been sent abroad to study in Palestine and Europe. On their return to Abyssinia, they formed the nucleus of a teaching staff, around which the educational work was organised.<sup>9</sup>

5) Large numbers of pupils had been instructed in Hebrew and in Jewish religion and history, which had made traditional sources of Judaism more accessible to

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<sup>6</sup> Faitlovitch to Levi, 7 May 1926, FC no.100, p.2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Review of the Pro-Falasha Work,' 28 May 1935, FC no.113, p.3.

them.<sup>10</sup>

6) A considerable number of Falashas in Amhara provinces were able to read and understand the Bible and Jewish prayers in Hebrew.<sup>11</sup>

7) There was an increased desire for Hebrew instruction and for Jewish learning in general.<sup>12</sup>

8) The "self-consciousness" of the Falashas had thoroughly changed and "Jewish feelings" had become stronger and more pronounced in every regard.<sup>13</sup>

9) The Falashas who were "hier encore négligés et traités presque en parias" had had their social situation raised "grâce à cette instruction qui a toujours et partout fait l'honneur et la force du Juif dans le monde."<sup>14</sup>

10) The Falasha teachers had gained respect from local authorities and even from representatives of foreign powers.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Work of the American Pro-Falasha Committee,' p.7, FC no.113.

<sup>11</sup> Faitlovitch to Frisch, 22 June 1923, p.8, FC no.99.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Faitlovitch to Levi, 7 May 1926, p.2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. Faitlovitch wrote elsewhere that as a result of his education, Tamrat Imanuél was regarded as "one of the most outstanding men of Addis Ababa, being respected in the community and in government circles" as his education placed him in "a class with the few highly educated people in the Capital of Abyssinia." (Faitlovitch, 'The Work of the American Pro-Falasha Committee in Abyssinia,' p.6). See chapter 2, footnote 112.

According to Yona Boggalä, the news of the opening of the main Falasha school in Addis Ababa was received by the Falashas of Bägämder and elsewhere "as a fairytale." He wrote that "young men and grown up people did not hesitate to walk the several hundred kilometres by foot to reach the school." He noted that the school had a population of eighty boarding students, the majority of whom had come from different parts of the country.<sup>16</sup>

Yona Boggalä reported that after two years of study, the mature students would be sent to the interior to establish schools in the main Falasha villages. According to his account, besides the schools in Dämbeya and Addis Ababa, others were established in the following villages-: "1) Wokerdiba in the Woggera region 2) Wachgedebge in the Belessa region 3) Beluha in the Kwara region 4) Yadeva in the Kwara region 5) Wolkait in the Wolkait region."<sup>17</sup> Finally, he wrote that from 1924 to 1935 about forty students were sent to Palestine and Europe and on their return to Abyssinia, some of them became teachers in the Addis Ababa school and others, employees in government offices.

However, it would appear that Faitlovitch's alleged results of his educational programme were rather exaggerated both

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<sup>16</sup> Yona Boggalä, 'Short History of the Dr. Faitlovitch School in Addis Ababa,' March 1977, Archives of the Ben Zvi Institute. Also quoted in D. Kessler, *Falashas*, p.145.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

by himself and Yona Boggalä. Firstly, although temporary schools may have been set up in the areas mentioned,<sup>18</sup> the only semi-permanent institute was the one established in Addis Ababa and, to a lesser extent, the one in Dämbeya.

Although it is difficult to calculate the number of pupils who attended the school in Dämbeya, one can assume that due to the difficulties that it constantly faced, very few pupils actually attended at any given time.<sup>19</sup> In addition, according to my informants, the school in Addis Ababa was better known and it also provided accommodation, food and clothing for its students, benefits which were not afforded to the students in Dämbeya.<sup>20</sup> What is more, the number of pupils who attended the school in Addis Ababa was also much lower than anticipated by Faitlovitch and reckoned by Yona Boggalä. The maximum number of pupils who attended the school in the capital at any given time was no more than approximately forty.<sup>21</sup> There are several explanations for

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<sup>18</sup> At locations where Faitlovitch distributed medical supplies, he would take the opportunity to instruct the Falashas, who frequented the clinic to find relief for their ailments, in religious matters. (Faitlovitch, 'Report Presented to Adler,' p.3). However, once the medical supplies had been distributed, the instruction, in the majority of cases, was also discontinued. (Faitlovitch to Lucas, 31 January 1921, AJDC Archives, New York, file no.109).

<sup>19</sup> Faitlovitch, himself, described the school in Dämbeya, on several occasions, as a 'small school.'

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Mängestu Elyas, a former student at the Addis Ababa school, 28 September 1995.

<sup>21</sup> In January 1926, the number of pupils attending the school in Addis Ababa rose from 25 to 40 with the introduction of instruction for females. However, the

this very modest number of pupils. Firstly, despite the fact that Faitlovitch initially placed no restriction on the amount of pupils he could accommodate at the school,<sup>22</sup> it is apparent that very few Falashas dared to venture to the capital, which for the majority of them and their parents, was a great distance from their villages.<sup>23</sup> Secondly, financial constraints eventually placed pressure on Faitlovitch to reduce the number of students in attendance at the school.

Furthermore, the number of pupils sent abroad to study would also seem to be far below that anticipated by Faitlovitch and calculated by Yona Boggalä.<sup>24</sup> According to

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numbers fell rapidly from May 1926 when only 20 students were enrolled; Summer of 1926 - 15 students; Fall of 1926 - 10 students. (Faitlovitch, 'Work of the American Pro-Falasha Committee,' p.4, FC no.113).

<sup>22</sup> According to my interviewees, Faitlovitch also sent young Falashas as messengers (not necessarily students at the school) to Falasha villages to encourage as many male youths as possible to attend the school in Addis Ababa. (Interviews with Mängestu Yeshaq, 7 February 1995; Mängestu Elyas, 28 September 1995; Qes Tayyā, 20 March 1995). Qes Tayyā's statement would indicate that messengers were sent as far as Qwara in order to canvass for recruits.

<sup>23</sup> According to Mängestu Yeshaq, who studied in the Addis Ababa school from 1928 to 1930, Faitlovitch and his messengers asked the Falashas "to give their children to him as students ... [who] will send them to Europe and later they will be illustrious, famous people who will be able to come back and do good for the rest of you." (Interview conducted in French, 7 February 1995). Although, according to Mängestu, several parents gave their sons to Faitlovitch or his messengers, the majority of Falashas were reluctant to part with their children, a reaction which although he regretted, he understood completely.

<sup>24</sup> However, it should also be noted that the Falashas constituted a significant proportion of the 200 Ethiopians who studied abroad in the decade and a half before 1935.



a report in the Faitlovitch collection which can be confirmed from other sources, the following is a list of Falasha pupils sent to Palestine and Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, when the majority were sent abroad.<sup>25</sup>

Palestine (7 boys: aged 15 to 19)

- 1) Ezra Malefya : In Jerusalem from 1924
- 2) Ruben Issayas: In Jerusalem from 1924
- 3) Shemaryahu (Aleka Hermias): In Jerusalem from 1925.<sup>26</sup>

The following four were under the care of the Professional School of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Jerusalem:

- |                           |                        |   |                 |
|---------------------------|------------------------|---|-----------------|
| 4) Yeheskiel Messeli      | In Jerusalem from 1926 |   |                 |
| 5) Tegeri (Tagueni) Yosef | "                      | " | "               |
| 6) Ezra Ouerge            | "                      | " | "               |
| 7) Abraham Barok          | "                      | " | " <sup>27</sup> |

Europe (11 boys: aged 12 to 18)

- 1) Hizkiahu Finas - Turin, Italy from 1922 - studied medicine.

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(See Bahru Zewde, *History of Modern Ethiopia*, p.109).

<sup>25</sup> This list is in addition to those pupils who had been sent abroad prior to 1922. This would include Gété Ermeayas, Tamrat Imanuél and Sälomon Isaac.

<sup>26</sup> According to the report, the three boys received trade education having received a general tuition.

<sup>27</sup> Abraham Barok also studied Rabbinic studies in Switzerland.

- 2) Jonah Bogale - Frankfurt-on-Main from 1924.<sup>28</sup>
- 3) Jonadon
- 4) Menasse - Hochburg from 1924 - studied aeronautical mechanics.
- 5) Dawit Tayim - Halberstadt from 1925 - studied languages.
- 6) Hailu Alazar Desta - Munich from 1927- government studies.
- 7) Iyasuf - Leipzig from 1927
- 8) Abraham Abera - Vienna from 1924 - studied dentistry.
- 9) Levi Makonnen (Gobew) - London from 1927 - studied languages.
- 10) Abraham - London from 1927 - government studies.<sup>29</sup>

Richard Pankhurst also mentioned the following Falasha students who were sent abroad during the 1920s and 1930s.

- 1) Yeshitela Hizgias - studied carpentry in Germany.
- 2) Gebeyu Aragay - studied printing in Germany.
- 3) Mengestu Yeshaq (Yitsak) - studied in Strasbourg.
- 4) Mekuria Tsegay - studied government studies in Strasbourg.
- 5) Mengistu Senbetu - studied Rabbinic studies in

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<sup>28</sup> Yona Boggalä also studied in Jerusalem, Switzerland and France where he studied Rabbinic studies.

<sup>29</sup> Anonymous, 'Falasha Boys in Palestine and Europe,' FC no.128. As file 128 in the Faitlovitch collection is entitled 'Missionary Activities Amongst the Falashas,' it may be assumed that the list was drawn up by a missionary. Additional information was obtained from Pankhurst, 'Foundations,' p.277).

Yugoslavia.<sup>30</sup>

6) Tadesse Yaqob - studied economics in Egypt.<sup>31</sup>

Although Mängestu Yeshaq accepted the notion that the purpose of his stay in Europe was to attain a sufficient level of education to be able to return to Ethiopia and take part in the instruction of the Falashas, the majority of Falashas educated abroad, including Mängestu, did not teach on their return.<sup>32</sup> In addition, Mängestu Elyas, who also admitted that the purpose of his education at the Addis Ababa school was to become a teacher, did not become one after his stay of three years in the capital.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, there would appear to be only a handful of Falashas who did in fact become teachers on their return to Ethiopia from studying abroad or on returning to their villages from the capital. The most noteworthy of these Falasha students were Tamrat Imanuél, Gété Ermeyas, Reuben Issayas and later, Yona Boggalä.<sup>34</sup> There are several reasons for this situation. Firstly, according to a report sent by the

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<sup>30</sup> Mängestu Sänbātu is mentioned in the chapter on the Italian occupation since he pledged his allegiance to the Italian government.

<sup>31</sup> Pankhurst, 'Foundations,' p.277.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Mängestu Yeshaq, 7 February 1995. He studied in Strasbourg from 1930 for four years after having studied in Addis Ababa for a period of two years.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Mängestu Elyas, 28 September 1995.

<sup>34</sup> Ezra Malefya and Tegeri Yosef also became teachers in Gondar and Bägämder respectively. However, it is unclear whether they taught Falashas or other Ethiopians.

Alliance Israélite Universelle to Faitlovitch, the choice of Falashas sent to its school in Jerusalem was not made "very judiciously." The institute complained that they were "trop grands et difficiles à se plier à toute discipline [et] ... très prétentieux." The students would also appear to have been misinformed about the purpose of their education abroad since they complained that the reason behind their stay in the institute was "pour étudier et non pour apprendre un métier." In addition, there were complaints that their requests were unreasonable concerning their work and study schedule.<sup>35</sup>

Secondly, according to several sources, a number of those Falashas who were educated abroad died before returning to Ethiopia. It would appear that tuberculosis took a heavy toll because of the change of climate and absence of adequate care.<sup>36</sup>

Faitlovitch and the American Pro-Falasha Committee also

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<sup>35</sup> Abreham, in particular, was very problematic. He began to study metalwork and then wanted to switch to woodwork; he consistently complained about the food; he asked to have a separate room and be allowed to go to bed and get up whenever he wished; he also wanted to work half a day and study the other half. (Alliance Israélite Universelle to Faitlovitch, 29 August 1926, FC no.99).

<sup>36</sup> Yona Boggalä in Pankhurst, 'Foundations,' p. 277. Sälomon Yeshaq, Abreham Abärä, Hezqeyas Finhas, Abreham Barok were among those died. The death of Hezqeyas Finhas is documented in a private file of Alfonso Pacifici, President of the Comitato Per il Mantenimento Agli Studi Del Giovane Falascia which was responsible for Hezqeyas's well-being during his stay in Turin. See also E. Trevisan-Semi, 'The Death of Faitlovitch's Pupil, Hezqeyas Finhas' in Appleyard et al., (eds.), *Proceedings*. (forthcoming).

failed to honour many of their financial commitments to the young Falashas who were sent abroad. This failure caused a considerable burden on the host communities as, in the majority of cases, they were unable to provide for 'Faitlovitch's proteges.'<sup>37</sup>

Finally, in the words of one Faitlovitch student, Abreham Abärra, although his "ardent dream" was "to return and live among his people, and to give them something of the opportunities of [the] education" he had in Europe,<sup>38</sup> he was convinced that he had to "have other work in order to earn a living." "It is forbidden in the Talmud to take money for teaching," he proclaimed.<sup>39</sup> Although not all the Falasha students used this as a pretext for not utilising their newly developed skills, the majority did in fact neglect their commitment to Faitlovitch. In fact, many

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<sup>37</sup> Levi Makonnen, the Falasha boy sent to school in England, was insufficiently funded during his stay in the country. The family with whom the boy was placed and the school to which he was sent, Townley Castle School, were forced to find the funds for his upkeep themselves, contrary to Faitlovitch's guarantees. (V. Schonfeld to Samuel Levine, Principal of Townley Castle Schools, 16 November 1928, file no. C2/3/2, London Metropolitan Archives). He was in fact considered to be a "very great disappointment" by his carers, a considerable burden and a waste of money. (Levene to H.M. Bakkala, First Secretary of the Ethiopian Legation, 20 July 1931, file no. C2/3/2, LMA). Eventually, following an ultimatum from his adopted family, the British Jewish Community was compelled to defray the cost of his repatriation to Ethiopia, following a stay of four years which was fraught with considerable difficulties. (I am indebted to Emanuela Trevisan Semi for informing me of the existence of this file.)

<sup>38</sup> "Surely I shall teach" he declared to Herman Norden.

<sup>39</sup> H. Norden, *Africa's Last Empire*, (London, 1930), pp.189-90.

Falashas who were educated at the school in Addis Ababa and sent abroad were able to find positions with the Ethiopian government.<sup>40</sup> They were recruited by Haile Sellassie, along with other "newly educated"<sup>41</sup> Ethiopians as part of his development programme for Ethiopia.<sup>42</sup> It is well known that he had placed great emphasis on education and the development of schools and encouraged young Ethiopians, including Falashas, to study abroad in order to obtain a western education.<sup>43</sup> The educated Falashas, on their return to Ethiopia, clearly realised the advantages of their training and few therefore chose to return to their villages to become teachers, but were attracted instead to the far better conditions and guaranteed wages that

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<sup>40</sup> These included the following Falasha students:- Hailu Alazar Desta joined the State Bank of Ethiopia; Mängestu Yeshaq entered the service of the Ministry of Education; Mekuria Tsegay joined the Ethiopian customs; Abreham Adgeh was employed by the Addis Ababa Municipality; Mängestu Elyas who, after the Italian occupation, worked for the Ethiopian government and Taddäsä Yaqob who rose to an assistant minister in the Ethiopian government. (Pankhurst, 'Foundation,' p.277 and Interviews with Mängestu Yeshaq, 7 February 1995 and Mängestu Elyas, 28 September 1995).

<sup>41</sup> Marcus, *History*, p. 119.

<sup>42</sup> See Marcus, *Haile Sellassie I*, p.99,

<sup>43</sup> The Regent's and later emperor's ideas about progress for his country were "strictly European" and believed that its advancement "required a cadre educated in western ideas." (Marcus, *History*, p.122). With regards to the Falashas, it should be recalled that in a letter to Faitlovitch, Ras Täfäri expressed his enthusiasm towards Faitlovitch's scheme of sending students abroad to Europe to study due to the benefit that Ethiopia would derive from their western education. (Letter dated April 1924 quoted in Faitlovitch, *Epistle of the Bearer of Good News*).

government service provided.<sup>44</sup>

Therefore, Faitlovitch's education and schools programme can in many respects be considered a failure. Indeed, only a small number of Falashas would appear to have been affected by his educational campaign and those who were, remained indifferent to Faitlovitch's cause, apart from a few exceptions. It is known that a knowledge of Hebrew never became widespread among the Falashas.<sup>45</sup> It is also the case that the booklets which were distributed among the Falashas had little impact owing to the high level of illiteracy among the Falashas. Nevertheless, it is also necessary to examine the results of Faitlovitch's other schemes before reaching a substantiated conclusion on the impact of Jacques Faitlovitch on the Falashas.

#### Counter-Missionary Activity

According to Faitlovitch, missionary activity posed the greatest threat to the existence of the Falashas.<sup>46</sup> It is therefore not surprising to observe that many of his programmes were designed to combat the missionary campaign, often using the same methods as the missionaries

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<sup>44</sup> See also Waldman, *Beyond the Rivers*, p.215.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Faitlovitch believed that 50,000 Falashas had converted to Christianity by 1904 as a result of the mission to the Jews of Ethiopia and that there were only another 50,000 who remained Jewish. (See Zepin, 'The Falashas,' pp.11-12).

themselves.<sup>47</sup>

During Faitlovitch's second expedition to the Falashas, he encountered the missionaries, based in Jenda, for the first time. They confronted him in the village Amba Gualit about the distribution of his booklets which warned the Falashas of the missionaries. A heated debate resulted during which Faitlovitch allegedly 'proved' that there were no references to Jesus in the Old Testament. The Falashas who had been listening to the argument told the missionaries "you dare to teach us yet you yourselves do not know what is written in your book. Go and study your religion first and then come and teach us." The missionaries left the village defeated and ashamed.<sup>48</sup>

Faitlovitch asserted that the missionaries had been dealt a severe blow to their activities even prior to this defeat. He noted that, during his first expedition, the missionaries' work had been affected by his presence in Ethiopia.<sup>49</sup> Faitlovitch also believed that in the years between his first and second trips not one conversion had

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<sup>47</sup> Distribution of Bibles and booklets, the establishment of schools and the employment of native staff, were techniques also used by Protestant missionaries to attract converts to their camp.

<sup>48</sup> Faitlovitch, *Journey*, pp.71-72.

<sup>49</sup> Faitlovitch claimed that Falashas had informed him that missionaries had written to the headquarters of the mission in Europe to obtain advice on how to convert the Falashas to Christianity before help from European Jewry could start to arrive. (Ibid., p.72).



occurred amongst the Falashas. Moreover, a few of the Falashas who had converted to Christianity had 'returned to Judaism' and others were waiting for the right opportunity to follow in their footsteps.<sup>50</sup>

This trend, according to Faitlovitch, appears to have continued for some time. In 1915, he wrote that "since my appearance in Abyssinia, conversion has been paralysed. In their reports the missionaries complain of their present want of success and assert that the Falashas do not want to listen to them any longer, as they are expecting assistance from the Jews in Europe."<sup>51</sup> Faitlovitch alleged elsewhere that, as a result of his expeditions in 1904, 1908 and 1913, "the Falashas were made to realise the unwarranted character of the Bible explanations foisted upon them through the instruction imparted in their vernacular by the emissaries of the Christian Church."<sup>52</sup>

In 1923 Faitlovitch believed that the distribution of his booklets "counteracted very efficaciously the conversionist movement of the Christian missionaries" as they had contributed to the development of a strong "Jewish self-consciousness ... among the Falashas."<sup>53</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Black Jews,' p.13.

<sup>52</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Falashas - Presentation,' no date, FC no.142.

<sup>53</sup> Faitlovitch to Frisch, 22 March 1923, p.3, FC no.99.

Faitlovitch refuted an article in an American Jewish newspaper entitled "Falashas are embracing Christianity"<sup>54</sup> in which it was claimed that, according to a report presented by Rev. Friedrich Flad at a meeting of the London Missionary Society, thousands of Falashas were embracing Christianity. Faitlovitch stated that the report in the newspaper was incorrect and "forged by the missionaries for their propaganda" since they were, at that time, intending "to recommence and renew the mission work among the Falashas."<sup>55</sup> Faitlovitch declared in June 1923 that in Addis Ababa, where Flad was based in March of that year, not one Falasha had converted to Christianity and the Falashas in the capital had refused to meet with him. This also occurred, according to Gété Ermeyas, when Flad ventured into the interior at the end of March and arrived at the Falasha village of Wälläqa.<sup>56</sup>

Faitlovitch was aware of the possibility that Flad might try and affiliate with the Protestant missions in Eritrea in order to make contact with the Falashas of the interior. However, he was convinced that Flad would fail in his endeavour to re-organise the old missionary stations that were established by his father and would in fact achieve no results in his missionary campaign.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Jewish Spectator*, 23 March 1923, Memphis Tennessee.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Faitlovitch to Frisch, 22 June 1923, p.7, FC no.99.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

It would appear, according to Faitlovitch's subsequent reports, that his predictions were correct. In May 1926 he wrote that there had been an "arrêt complet des conversions"<sup>58</sup> which had occurred thanks to the development of his educational programme and especially, the opening of a school in Addis Ababa.<sup>59</sup> This claim was repeated in 1929, when the Addis Ababa school was fully established.<sup>60</sup>

Faitlovitch asserted that this counter-missionary success continued until the educational programme in the interior was disrupted. By this time "the conversion movement [had] been stopped, Jewish sentiments strengthened and a spiritual revival perceived in many Falasha communities." The prospect, he claimed in 1934, was very hopeful and the problem nearing its solution. However, from the time of the disruption of its programme, the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity Among the Jews "unfolded a wide propaganda amongst the scattered Falasha communities" and new missionaries arrived and besieged the "Jewish villages in the remotest parts of the country." With their arrival, school stations with ambulances were opened and bibles and

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<sup>58</sup> Faitlovitch to Levi, 7 May 1926, p.2, FC no.100.

<sup>59</sup> Faitlovitch, 'The Work of the American Pro-Falasha Committee,' p.7, FC no.113. Faitlovitch stated elsewhere that as a result of these activities, "it may be said that the Falashas have been definitely safeguarded from being converted by the missionaries, thus putting a stop to a movement which had been going on with great rapidity before this work was organized." (Faitlovitch, 'A Review of the Pro-Falasha Work,' 28 May 1935, FC no.113).

<sup>60</sup> The American Pro-Falasha Committee, 'Twenty-Fifth Anniversary,' approx. 1929, FC no.142.

Christian literature were widely distributed.<sup>61</sup>

The revival of missionary activity had, according to Faitlovitch, caused a 'spiritual depression' among the Falashas and had attracted young Falashas to the evangelical camp.<sup>62</sup> However, the missionaries' success was also short-lived as they were expelled from Ethiopia in 1935/36, together with other foreigners including Faitlovitch, at the time of the Italian occupation of the country.

#### Faitlovitch in the Missionary Reports

In order to gauge the accuracy of Faitlovitch's reports, we may refer to other sources which examine the impact of Faitlovitch's programme for the Falashas on missionary activity in Ethiopia.

Firstly, according to Rev. Eric Payne, the counter-mission, led by Jacques Faitlovitch, did have a profound effect on missionary activity in Ethiopia. He believes that Faitlovitch had a much greater impact on the Falashas than the Christian missionaries as he was able to 'prove' that he was of the same faith as the Falashas. He therefore posed a serious threat to the work of the London Society in

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<sup>61</sup> Faitlovitch to the American Pro-Falasha Committee, 19 August 1934, AJDC Archives, New York, file no.433, pp.4-5.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

Ethiopia, as long as funds from overseas were forthcoming.<sup>63</sup>

This claim, by Payne, of Faitlovitch's success in his battle to combat the missionaries, is also confirmed in contemporary missionary journals.<sup>64</sup> In 1905, Faitlovitch is reported to have "visited many villages, distributed much money, visited the high priest and said to all, 'do not listen to these deceivers, these fellows ought to be hanged.'" One missionary also wrote that "he took with him two Falasha youths, whom he will send back with Rabbis to instruct the Falashas in Judaism and in the Talmud and also to try and convert back [the] proselytes."<sup>65</sup>

In 1906, the same journal reported the opposition which the 'native missionaries' encountered as a result of Faitlovitch's visit. After a discussion of Bible passages at the village of Tata, they were literally chased out by the Falashas, some of whom threatened the missionaries with violence if they were to return.<sup>66</sup> In other villages it was reported that the Falashas were not willing to listen to the words of the missionaries and they generally received

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with Payne, 10 March 1994.

<sup>64</sup> The missionary journals described Faitlovitch as "the enemy of our Falasha mission." (See for example, *JR*, 1926-27, p.110).

<sup>65</sup> H. Negoosie, *JMI*, July 1906, p.107.

<sup>66</sup> In the village of Aila, the missionaries were chased out by a mob of young men with sticks in their hands. (Däbtärah Ishanaw, *ibid.*, October 1906, p.156).

a poor reception wherever they went. Hiob Negoosie, one of the main 'native-missionaries' placed the blame for their want of success on Faitlovitch as he maintained that "the Falashas were deaf to our message because of the money and instructions received from that French Jew, who called himself Aba Jakab."<sup>67</sup> The missionaries were in fact told by the Falashas that they would not listen to "Mr. Flad's children" until the young Falasha taken by Faitlovitch overseas returned to tell them about the Jews in Europe and "which way to go to receive everlasting life."<sup>68</sup>

Faitlovitch's message to the Falashas that warned them to avoid contact with the missionaries was understood by the latter to have been widely disseminated. The missionaries not only wrote that the Falashas were behaving very "reservedly"<sup>69</sup> and "cautiously" since his arrival but Faitlovitch had also influenced Emperor Menilek. In fact, the emperor is reported to have decreed that "the Falashas must remain Falashas and keep the religion of their forefathers and 'the sons of Flad' shall no further trouble them with their teaching."<sup>70</sup> This clearly troubled the missionaries as they realised that if Menilek was to issue an edict to this effect, they would no longer be allowed to

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<sup>67</sup> H. Negoosie, *JMI*, August 1906, p.118.

<sup>68</sup> Däbtärah Ain Alem, *JMI*, September 1906, p.140.

<sup>69</sup> Däbtärahs Negoosie, Ain Alem, Asressa, *JMI*, September 1908, p.134.

<sup>70</sup> Däbtära Hiyob Negusé, *JMI*, July 1908, p.107.

enter Falasha villages.<sup>71</sup>

The missionary journals continued to report on the negative effect that Faitlovitch had had on their work and it would appear that the number of conversions had steadily decreased since his first expedition to Ethiopia. The missionaries clearly saw his programme as a threat to their work as everywhere he went they claimed he influenced the Falashas "not to believe what we teach, to drive us out of their villages and to remain Falashas."<sup>72</sup>

According to the missionaries, Faitlovitch caused the most trouble to their work when he was actually based in Ethiopia since his visits "temporarily ... interfered with the efforts of the agents."<sup>73</sup> During his third expedition, it was reported that "considerable trouble was caused amongst the Falashas by the arrival in their midst of Dr. Faitlovitch, who was sent out by the Jewish community to visit the Jews and to endeavour to counteract the efforts of the missionary agents. He distributed much money amongst the Falashas and endless difficulties were caused to the agents by his promises and false statements."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid. The missionaries hoped that Menilek, who was a Christian, would not do such a thing, yet Hiyob Negusé claimed that "presents blind the eyes, even of Kings."

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Michael Argawi, *JMI*, 1922, p.24.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

As well as exhorting the Falashas to remain faithful to their religion and not to listen to the words of the missionaries, he also attempted "to instruct the Falashas in the Talmud and convert them to Rabbinical Judaism." Although he was not successful in this endeavour, his presence was still felt by the missionaries when "he distributed many presents and thousands of dollars, which he had received from Jews in Europe and America."<sup>75</sup> In the 1920's, as Faitlovitch mentions, his presence continued to remain "a stumbling block" for the missionaries which "greatly grieved" them.<sup>76</sup>

As the mission continued and Faitlovitch's education programme progressed, the missionaries became aware that the Falashas had been taught the familiar arguments of the European Jews.<sup>77</sup> In discussions with the Falashas this became evident when those who had been taught by the Jewish counter-mission attempted to argue with the 'native-missionaries' about religious matters and biblical texts.<sup>78</sup>

Therefore, according to Faitlovitch's reports and the missionaries' accounts, it would appear that his programme for the Falashas did have an adverse impact on the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p.27, p.42.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.133.

<sup>77</sup> See Flad, *Abyssinia*.

<sup>78</sup> See for example, W. Heintze, *JMI*, December 1932, p.148.



Protestant mission and from the time of his first expedition, the number of conversions amongst the Falashas began to decrease. Faitlovitch's influence was especially felt when he was actually based in Ethiopia and thus able to communicate directly with the Falashas rather than through an intermediary: the rate of conversions was at its lowest when Faitlovitch was in Ethiopia. Nevertheless, according to the same sources, relatively few of those who had already converted returned to their former religion, as Faitlovitch had originally anticipated.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, although Faitlovitch would appear to have caused some disruption to the missionaries' programme, it should not be assumed that this was caused by the acceptance of his message by the majority of Falashas. We must also consider the fact that although Faitlovitch and the missionaries were in competition with one another to gain recruits, they also used the same methods of persuasion such as education and both criticised the Falashas' religion. Since Faitlovitch often had better financial support than the missionaries and was thus able to provide better facilities, it seems feasible that more Falashas were attracted to Faitlovitch for this reason. Conversely,

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<sup>79</sup> The reason for this is unclear although according to one of my sources, it was due to the anticipated poor reception that would be encountered if they were to return to their villages as former converts. (Interview with Mängestu Yeshaq, 7 February 1995). Another possible reason, suggested by Faitlovitch, is that the local Ethiopian authorities severely punished those converts who left Christianity by confiscating all their property. (Faitlovitch, *Journey*, p.65).

many Falashas went over to the missionary camp at times when Faitlovitch was experiencing serious financial difficulties.

### The Results of Faitlovitch's Political Campaign

As we have already discussed, Faitlovitch believed that the key to the improvement of the Falashas' political and social situation in Ethiopia lay with the local and higher Ethiopian authorities. It is therefore to be expected that Faitlovitch went to considerable lengths in order to gain the trust and respect of both the local chiefs of areas which the Falashas inhabited and, of course, the emperor himself. According to Faitlovitch's reports, booklets and correspondence, he obtained approval for his programme from both Menilek and Haile Sellassie during his various expeditions. Moreover, Faitlovitch also believed that he had managed to convince the emperors to issue edicts prohibiting the maltreatment of the Falashas.

Following his first expedition to Ethiopia, Faitlovitch attributed his success to Emperor Menilek: he stated that "thanks to the liberality of this intelligent and bold ruler, I could with official consent move freely and venture undisturbed in the country and apply myself to the projected research work I aimed to perform."<sup>80</sup> He also

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<sup>80</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Preface,' no date, p.4. In an interview with the *Jewish Chronicle*, Faitlovitch asserted that his task had been "facilitated [everywhere] by the Governors, representatives of the Negus Menilek to whom I had been recommended and who placed an escort of soldiers

believed the Falashas would be free to practise their religion and live in security under Menilek's rule.<sup>81</sup>

In spite of a downturn in the situation of the Falashas during the transitional period between the death of Menilek and the accession of Haile Sellassie,<sup>82</sup> Faitlovitch stated in 1926, that there had been an "amélioration [du] point de vue social et politique de la situation de la population juive de ce pays."<sup>83</sup>

In 1928, with the coronation as King of Haile Sellassie, Faitlovitch was very optimistic about the future of his programme in Ethiopia and the political and social situation of the Falashas, as he considered the emperor a very "liberal, enlightened and tolerant ruler." Several years later Faitlovitch believed that his prediction had been correct. In 1935 he wrote that "the social and

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at my disposal." (27 October 1905).

<sup>81</sup> In Faitlovitch's first and second booklets, *The Falasha Epistle* and *An Epistle of Fraternity*, Faitlovitch noted the good treatment of the Falashas under Menilek II who allowed them to lead a free life and to practise their religion without any restriction.

<sup>82</sup> In 1920, as was mentioned earlier, Faitlovitch reported that the political situation had taken a different course. Since the death of Menilek, the situation was not favourable for the Falashas as it had placed them in "an untoward and insecure situation." (Faitlovitch to Schneiderman, 4 January 1921, p.1, FC no.100). The situation had improved by 1923, Faitlovitch stated, but it still was not "too ... encouraging for progressive educational enterprises." (Faitlovitch to Frisch, 22 June 1923, p.10, FC no.99).

<sup>83</sup> Faitlovitch to Levi, 7 May 1926, p.2, FC no.100.

political status of the Falashas has ... been considerably elevated." He further noted that before the initiation of his work, "the Falashas were virtually considered as pariahs; in some places their cult was suppressed." However, by 1935, he believed the Falashas were "generally held in respect and [were] comparatively free from oppression." "As a matter of fact," he proclaimed, "there [was] no discrimination whatsoever ... against them." Faitlovitch acknowledged that these improvements were, in great part, due to Haile Sellassie who maintained "a benevolent attitude toward the Falashas" and his activities.<sup>84</sup> Faitlovitch clearly believed that under Haile Sellassie the Falashas enjoyed unprecedented peace.<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, in order to assess the accuracy of his reports we need to examine other sources which throw light on the Falashas' political and social status from the time of Faitlovitch's first expedition to Ethiopia. From this we will be able to determine whether there was a real improvement to their lives or were these reports that paid tribute to Menilek and Haile Sellassie merely a public relations exercise conducted by Faitlovitch?

According to my interviewees, Faitlovitch does appear to

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<sup>84</sup> Faitlovitch, 'A Review of the Pro-Falasha Work,' 28 March 1935, pp.2-3, FC no.113.

<sup>85</sup> Faitlovitch, *Epistle of the Bearer of Good News*. Faitlovitch claimed that the "positive changes" in the Falashas' lives were as a result of reforms and religious freedom initiated by Emperor Menilek II and continued by Haile Sellassie.

have spent a great deal of time with Ethiopian governors, both local and regional, as well as with the Emperor, when he was based in Ethiopia.<sup>86</sup> The majority of Falashas I interviewed asserted that Faitlovitch campaigned tirelessly on their behalf in order to improve their situation. They maintained that Faitlovitch was instrumental in improving the Falashas' political and social status in Ethiopia.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, many expressed their admiration of Faitlovitch for his role in bringing a great improvement to their lives and professed that they were able to practise their religion unmolested thanks to his efforts.<sup>88</sup> Although the accusation of 'buda' was still prevalent, several interviewees claimed that from the time of Faitlovitch's first expedition to Ethiopia the allegations became less frequent.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, the instances of Falashas being led away to work in far-away places without pay also became less

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with Qés Yemanno, 4 April 1995. According to this informant, Faitlovitch spent almost as much time with the authorities as he did with the Falashas.

<sup>87</sup> Interviews with Ayyalu Abärra, 1 June 1995, Mengestu Yeshaq, 7 February 1995 and Qés Yemmano, 4 April 1995.

<sup>88</sup> The interviewees who mentioned this factor recalled Faitlovitch's success in persuading Haile Sellassie to issue an edict that prohibited the Falashas' employers from forcing them to work on the Sabbath. They claimed that from his arrival and especially during his sojourns in Ethiopia the Falashas were not obliged to work on the Sabbath. (Interviews with Ayyalu Abärra, 1 June 1995, Mängestu Elyas, 28 September 1995, Uva Akaller, 1 July 1995, Qés Barku, 16 May 1995).

<sup>89</sup> Interviews with Qés Yemanno, 15 February 1995 and Yoséf Dawit, 10 June 1995.

frequent.<sup>90</sup>

It is further apparent that Faitlovitch's alleged success in his campaign to improve the Falashas' political and social situation in Ethiopia was an intrinsic element in his attaining acceptance by the Falashas. Indeed, it appears that Falashas' anxieties of meeting with a white foreigner who claimed to be a Jew were relaxed once his plan to improve their situation became known. This endeavour and apparent success distinguished Faitlovitch from the missionaries and thus allowed him unprecedented access to the Falasha villages.<sup>91</sup>

Therefore, it would appear from both oral and written documentation that Faitlovitch was successful, at least temporarily, in his aim to bring about a bettering of the Falashas' political, social and religious status. It is evident, as we have seen, that Faitlovitch's influence was felt most strongly while he was located in Ethiopia. As a result of his political campaign, Faitlovitch established good relations with Menilek and Haile Sellassie and also with the local chiefs, which was of great benefit to his programme.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, by gaining the trust of the

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<sup>90</sup> Interviews with Yoséf Dawit and Zälläqä Dämozé, 6 March 1995 and 6 April 1995.

<sup>91</sup> Interviews with Ayyalu Abärra, 1 June 1995, Qés Yemanno, 4 April 1995 and Qés Barku, 16 May 1995.

<sup>92</sup> According to Yona Boggalä, Tamrat Imanuél and Haile Sellassie had also developed friendly relations. He claimed that "Tamrat's intervention with the Emperor sometimes

Falashas, it proved to be an great benefit for his programme.

Nevertheless, it is important not to overlook the fact that Haile Sellassie gave support to most Western missions that were operating in Ethiopia in his endeavour to develop his country and people. This included the Protestant Mission which was also treated favourably by the emperor.<sup>93</sup> For this reason, we must also consider the possibility that the Falashas' situation would have improved without Faitlovitch's intervention. Indeed, their apparent amelioration may have been more as a consequence of Haile Sellassie's development plan for Ethiopia, which also included a policy of religious tolerance.<sup>94</sup>

#### The Impact of Faitlovitch's Programmes on Falasha Society

According to Faitlovitch's own writings, his programme to

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could dissuade a local noble from stopping the provincial schools' establishment or operation." In addition, Tamrat's intervention occasionally helped in more drastic cases. Hence, "if a family could get word to Professor Tamrat, he sometimes could succeed in having the Emperor prevail upon an aristocrat to release a person from forced labour." (Yona Bogale and M. Squires, 'Ethiopia-Tamrat,' Ben Zvi Archives, unpublished notes).

<sup>93</sup> The missionaries considered Haile Sellassie as "a friend of all missions and is a very good friend of our mission too." (C.F.W Flad, *JMI*, July 1933). He apparently gave all possible support to the mission as he was "determined to give his people the best that western civilisation has to offer." (W. Heintze, *JMI*, May 1935).

<sup>94</sup> For a list of Haile Sellassie's plans for the development of Ethiopia and the role he envisaged for foreigners see Haile Sellassie, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress 1892-1937*, translated and annotated by E. Ullendorff, (Oxford, 1977), pp. 65-76.

assist the Falashas would appear to have been an overwhelming success. He clearly believed that as a result of the achievements he claimed in the educational, political and anti-missionary fields, he had been able to accomplish his ultimate aim - the regeneration and reformation of the Falashas' social and religious lives.

However, Faitlovitch also admitted that initially it had been very difficult to gain the trust of the Falashas. He noted that after having come into contact with the Falashas for the first time in 1904 and informed them that he "was one of their brothers," their reaction was one of "extreme reserve ... distrust and incredulity."<sup>95</sup> It was only after considerable persuasion that Faitlovitch managed to

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<sup>95</sup> 'Interview with Faitlovitch,' *JC*, 27 October 1905, p.28. In another report it was claimed that the Falashas did not trust Faitlovitch as "tous les Européens qui viennent chez nous se disent Juifs; mais c'est faux, car ils ont tous prêché l'Evangile. Du reste, il ne doit plus subsister de Juifs dans le monde. Il y aura bientôt quarante ans, vint ici un blanc, se disant Juif; il se nommait Iosief [Joseph Halevy]; lui aussi nous avait affirmé l'existence de Juifs en Europe; ils nous avait promis de s'intéresser à nous en priant ses frères, qui ont formé une société pour l'instruction de leur coréligionnaires, de nous envoyer des maîtres et des rabbins pour nous instruire également, afin que nous puissions marcher droit dans les voies de Moïse. A cet effet, un de nos frères partit avec lui pour étudier et voir nos frères d'Europe. Or, nous n'avons jamais reçu aucun témoignage de sympathie, pas la moindre nouvelle de ces Juifs blancs, dans lesquels nous avons mis notre espérance et notre confiance. Eux savent le chemin pour venir nous trouver; mais nous ne savons pas le chemin pour aller chez eux. Nous avons cherché la route; nous voulions aller jusqu'à Jérusalem, mais nous ne l'avons pu trouver. Il est donc certain que non seulement ce Iosief est mort, mais aussi tous les autres Juifs du monde entier, et qu'il n'en existe plus sur la terre, hors d'ici." (Faitlovitch, *Notes d'un Voyage*, p.13).



convince them of his true intentions and "dissipated their distrust."<sup>96</sup>

On his return to Ethiopia in 1908, Faitlovitch experienced the same hostility that he encountered on his first expedition.<sup>97</sup> Once again, however, he slowly regained their confidence as a result of two factors. Firstly, as we have seen, he returned this time with his student, Gété Ermeyas, which consequently dispelled the rumour that "tous les Falachas qui vont chez les Frendjis en Europe, sont tués par les missionnaires, s'ils ne veulent pas se baptiser."<sup>98</sup> Secondly, Faitlovitch was assisted by Däbtära Barok, whom he described as "a learned and judicious Falasha priest who was then religious head of the Jewish community of Adenkato in the province of Shire in the South-Western part of Tigre."<sup>99</sup> It is apparent that through the "laudable efforts" of Däbtarä Barok, Faitlovitch's "connections became more and more steady and cordial" as he helped "to dissipate their distrust" of him.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> 'Interview with Faitlovitch,' JC.

<sup>97</sup> Faitlovitch declared that "à cause de n'avoir pas reçu des nouvelles de moi, durant les trois dernières années, je n'étais pour eux, d'après leur jugement hâtif, qu'un imposteur comme tous les autres Européens." (Faitlovitch to unknown, 1 December 1908, ZA no.A142/94a).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. See also Faitlovitch, *Journey*, p.51.

<sup>99</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Preface,' no date, p.8, FC no.42. Däbtära Barok was the grandfather of one of my interviewees, Qés Yemanno.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p.9 and interview with Qés Yemanno, 4 April 1995.

After the Falashas' suspicions were allayed, Faitlovitch reported that he was given a rapturous welcome in the Falasha villages he visited.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, in some places they hailed him as a 'Rabbi' whom they should approach for forgiveness;<sup>102</sup> others were convinced that Faitlovitch was "a representative or officer of the army of the King of Israel" who had come to Ethiopia to redeem his brethren from slavery and return them to their ancient birthplace.<sup>103</sup> There were reportedly Falashas who even believed Faitlovitch was the "Messiah" or an "angel from heaven."<sup>104</sup> For this reason, the Falashas reportedly gave him a warm reception on all subsequent expeditions and there is no mention made in Faitlovitch's reports of any opposition to his programme by them.<sup>105</sup>

This acceptance of Faitlovitch by the Falashas can be confirmed by various letters sent from the Falashas to Faitlovitch and Western Jewish communities which are today located in the Faitlovitch Collection. Ostensibly, these

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<sup>101</sup> Faitlovitch, *Journey*, p.51.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p.64.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p.80.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> The only subsequent reported encounter which may be seen as a criticism of Faitlovitch or his work, was an opposition to the fact that he smoked. This was allegedly considered a "despicable" practice by all Ethiopians and one forbidden by God. (Ibid., p.52). See also Messing, *Story*, p.58.

typed letters, translated into English and French, indicate the excitement that was created by the arrival of Faitlovitch in their midst. For example, Faitlovitch is described in one letter as "comme la nourriture quand j'ai faim et comme l'eau quand j'ai soif."<sup>106</sup> Moreover, the Falashas, and especially the Däbtāras, would appear to have expressed their willingness to participate in Faitlovitch's programme and were in favour of his expressed endeavours.<sup>107</sup>

It is therefore not surprising to observe that, as a consequence of Faitlovitch's alleged achievement in establishing a good rapport with the Falashas and their leaders, he discussed his successes in regenerating and reforming the Falashas' lives. As a result of his programme for the Falashas, he wrote in the 1920's, that "the development of ... Jewish self-consciousness" had become

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<sup>106</sup> Letter 6 from Hezqeyas, FC no.83. This letter is also found written in the plural form i.e. "you are for us what bread is for our hunger and water for our thirst." It continues -"To see your face is looked upon by us as the word which Moses brought from Mount Sinai." (ZA no.A364/10014a).

<sup>107</sup> For example, in a letter dated 3 October 1920, several Däbtāras including Däbtāra Barok, wrote to the 'Jewish communities in Jerusalem and elsewhere' informing them that "Master Ya'ekob passed the rain season with us and instructed our children in the Hebrew language. Not only did he teach the little ones, but also while wintering, he made us, the grown ones (and we rejoiced) repeat the Laws and ordinances of the Pentateuch. We beg you not to withdraw henceforth from us the kind effects of your goodness, so that the seed and the name of Israel shall not become extirpated in the country of our exile. What we need most urgently at the present moment are the Pentateuch and the Prophets, Psalm-books and calendars." (FC no.83).

"perceptible among the Falashas"<sup>108</sup> and "Jewish feelings were getting stronger and more pronounced in every regard."<sup>109</sup> The Falashas, he maintained, had "changed favourably" because of their "intensified race consciousness"<sup>110</sup> and "spiritual revival,"<sup>111</sup> which had been initiated by Faitlovitch.

According to additional sources, on the other hand, Faitlovitch was far from achieving his aims prior to 1935. Although he may have been temporarily successful in curbing missionary activity and improving the Falashas' political and social status, he was, as we have seen, unsuccessful in the development of the educational programme. This therefore prevented him from achieving his ultimate aim: the regeneration and reformation of the Falashas' religious life.

It would appear from various sources that Faitlovitch's appearance in Ethiopia did in fact cause the development of two groups of Falashas, those who ostensibly supported his programme to modify their traditions and way of life and those who were fiercely opposed to any change.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Faitlovitch to Frisch, 22 March 1923, p.3, FC no.99.

<sup>109</sup> Faitlovitch to Frisch, 22 June 1923, p.7, FC no.99.

<sup>110</sup> Faitlovitch, 'Memorandum on the Pro-Falasha Movement,' no date, approx 1921/22, p.3, FC no.93.

<sup>111</sup> Faitlovitch to The American Pro-Falasha Committee, 19 August 1934, p.5, AJDC Archives, New York, file no.433.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Qés Barku, 16 May 1995.

After he had gained the trust of the former group of Falashas,<sup>113</sup> he was welcomed into their villages and allowed to preach, with the assistance of several Däbtäras, such as Abba Barok. According to Yona Boggalä, Faitlovitch, during his stay in Wälläqa, "would come to the synagogue on the Sabbath and in Amharic ... tell us stories about Jerusalem ... and the Jewish people. There were many stories and the priests would listen. To the priests' stories no-one wanted to listen only of Dr. Faitlovitch... We loved to see them every Sabbath and afterwards they organised evening classes ... We gave Dr. Faitlovitch a home. This was the home of Abba Barok ... Yeremiahu Ghettie would come and give us evening classes. we learnt Aleph Bet. A teacher such as this seemed to us like the sun, like a torch. This for us was something great, a wonder. There we learnt [Hebrew] songs. ... In the evening we would gather there and learn Hebrew, with such diligence."<sup>114</sup>

The Falashas who appeared to have supported Faitlovitch's

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<sup>113</sup> According to Qés Yemanno, Faitlovitch had to undergo several tests to prove he was an Israelite (Interview, 15 February 1995). These included tests on scriptures (interview with Ayyalu Abärra, 1 June 1995) and placing him in a tent for seven days (Qés Yemanno, 15 February). The Falashas eventually accepted him after a) he stated he was from Jerusalem, "the land of God" (Mängestu Yeshaq, 7 February 1995 and Yona Boggalä); b) approached the emperor and local leaders on the Falashas' behalf (Ayyalu Abärra) and c) was seen to observe the Sabbath. Before these tests Däbtära Barok did not physically touch Faitlovitch for fear of becoming 'impure.' (Interview with Qés Barku, 16 May 1995).

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Yona Boggalä, 29 January 1987.

programme respected him and, also in most cases, his students who had returned from abroad. They considered them as important men.<sup>115</sup> In addition, they also believed that Faitlovitch was sufficiently respectful of their traditions as, when he discussed the issue of modifying their religion, he said it in a way not to offend the community, the priests or the people.<sup>116</sup> Several of my interviewees declared that Faitlovitch identified the practices which distinguished them from 'other Jews', such as sacrifice and isolation huts. Instead of criticising these practises, he professed that they were not necessary but none the less accepted them as part of their culture and tradition.<sup>117</sup> He was also alleged to have stated that if it were not for their 'peculiar' customs he would not have 'discovered' the Falashas.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Interviews with Yona Boggalä, Mängestu Yeshaq, Zälläqä Dämozé, 6 March 1995. According to other sources, in their meetings with the Falashas, Faitlovitch and his disciples used to wear "bianche vesti talari, pantaloni larghi bianchi e piccolo berreto nero." This "mistico contegno" was "per maggiormente et incutere venerazione negli animi del'uditorio." (Copia del rapporto No. 411 del 3 Ottobre 1920 del Dotto Paulicelli, Regio Agente Commerciale italiano a Gondar diretto alla R. Legazione d'Italia in Addis Ababa, serie politica, 1919-1938, Posiz. 54/1, file no. 2976, ASMAE, located in the Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem).

<sup>116</sup> Interviews with Qés Barku, 16 May 1995 and Yona Boggalä. According to Yona Boggalä, "Dr. Faitlovitch would say things in a way not to offend the community, the priests or the people ... like this they do in Europe. ... Our custom is such and such and they understood."

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Mängestu Yeshaq, 7 February 1995.

<sup>118</sup> Interviews with Zälläqä Dämozé, 6 March 1995 and Qés Tayyā, 20 March 1995.

The Falashas who seemingly supported Faitlovitch and welcomed him believed that he had come to improve their lives. It is apparent that members of this group accepted Faitlovitch's claim to be a representative of their religion from outside the country and that he had come to Ethiopia to connect the Falashas with their co-religionists.

The second group of Falashas rejected Faitlovitch and his propaganda outright. Part of this group was composed of monks and priests who felt their authority under threat by Faitlovitch's presence in the country and by the influence of educated Falashas such as Tamrat Imanuél and Gété Ermeyas.<sup>119</sup> According to Abba Gété Asras, the chief monk of his village argued with Faitlovitch regarding his remarks that "sacrifices [were] forbidden everywhere except Jerusalem."<sup>120</sup> Other sources indicate that the resistance to Faitlovitch and his work was more widespread. Some believed that Faitlovitch represented a religion which was foreign to theirs since they did not regard Jewish

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<sup>119</sup> According to Yona Boggalä, some of the more religious Falashas would wash their hands after touching Tamrat or a student. He claimed that these old customs, by maintaining a formal distance, attenuated the threat of modernity's introduction. (Yona Bogale and M.Squires, 'Tamrat,' no date, Archives of Ben Zvi Institute).

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Abba Gété Asrass, 11 June 1975, Ambober, interviewed by James Quirin. I am indebted to Prof. Quirin for sending me a copy of the transcript of his interview.

Europeans as their co-religionists.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, some Falashas would appear to have claimed that their Bible was different from that of the Jews.<sup>122</sup> According to one statement, the Falashas in one village declared that they did not want Faitlovitch to enter their homes or synagogues or even to touch them.<sup>123</sup> What is more, there are reports which indicate that Faitlovitch's students also occasionally encountered some opposition on returning to their villages.<sup>124</sup>

Finally, Tamrat Imanuél, who worked very closely with Faitlovitch, was also quite opposed to his technique. According to Messing, Tamrat considered Faitlovitch to be

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<sup>121</sup> Ostini to Governor of Eritrea, 22 November 1912 and Ministero delle Colonie to Rabbi Margulies, 8 February 1912, Posiz 54/1, file no. 24, ASMAI, located in the Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem.

<sup>122</sup> Copias di lettera no. 264 in data, 27 Aprile 1913 diretta dalla Agenzia commerciale di Gondar al Governo dell'Eritrea; con oggetto: Professor Faitlovitch, ASMAI Archives.

<sup>123</sup> The declaration read as follows: "noi non lo facciamo entrare nelle nostre case e Sinagoghe e non lo tocchiamo con la manno. Ho detto anche che molti da noi hanno paura che Jacob porti via i nostri figli ... Ato Sahalu ha dichiarato questo avanti al Dagna Belata Alemnie ed ai testimoni Abba Hadis, Ghezu Tesamma, Ato Uondem, Maconnen Gobai, Gondar 2 January 1905. ASMAI Archives.

<sup>124</sup> According to a missionary report, a pupil of the Jewish counter-mission who had been in Europe on several occasions was not allowed to take part in the Falashas' festive celebrations and was required to sit with the missionaries. (Heintze, *JMI*, April 1938). Yona Boggalä reports that Gété Ermeyas was untactful and impatient in his quest for the modification of the Falashas' lives. Consequently, the priests banned him from his village and forbade all contact with him. (Interview with Yona Boggalä).



often harsh, stern, even mocking when criticising Falasha practices that he considered wrong or "ignorant."<sup>125</sup> He also was opposed to the idea that "Rabbinic Judaism should be imposed upon them to qualify them as Jews."<sup>126</sup>

In spite of an apparently sizeable group of Falashas who outwardly supported Faitlovitch and his programme, the lives of very few Falashas were actually affected by his message prior to 1935.<sup>127</sup> According to several sources, the only Falasha who conformed to normative Judaism during this period was Gété Ermeyas.<sup>128</sup> The remainder, in most cases, were unaffected religiously by Faitlovitch's influence. What is more, contrary to Faitlovitch's plan to rid the Falashas' religion of "unnecessary traditions," practises such as sacrifice, monasticism and the isolation huts were not abandoned.<sup>129</sup>

One explanation for Faitlovitch's failure to initiate

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<sup>125</sup> Messing, *Story*, footnote 62, p.104.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p.67.

<sup>127</sup> See also Abbink, *Falashas in Ethiopia and Israel*, pp. 87-92.

<sup>128</sup> See interviews with Yona Boggalä and Qés Barku, 16 May 1995. See also Waldman, *Beyond the Rivers*, p.215 and Messing, *Story*, p.63.

<sup>129</sup> Although isolation huts were not abandoned until the Falashas' arrival in Israel, it would appear that animal sacrifices were carried out less frequently and the number of monks had declined in the twentieth century, but not necessarily as a result of Faitlovitch's message. See Chapter 2. Also see Abbink, *Falashas in Ethiopia and Israel*, p.90 and Kaplan, *Beta Israel*, pp. 151-52.

change can be related to the fact that his educational campaign was unsuccessful. As this was seen as the key to achieving religious reform for the Falashas, Faitlovitch's failure in this realm therefore became an obstacle to the realisation of his main aspiration. Secondly, although pro-Falasha organisations disseminated the idea that Faitlovitch had worked among the Falashas for 30 years before the Italian invasion, he had in fact only been present in Ethiopia for a total of 3-4 years. Thirdly, as we have seen, Faitlovitch experienced great difficulties in fundraising overseas, for a variety of reasons, which greatly inhibited the progress of his programme. Fourthly, a combination of inadequate programming, which included contradictory aims and disorganised execution thereof, together with disputes among colleagues,<sup>130</sup> caused disarray to his project. Fifthly, Faitlovitch experienced

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<sup>130</sup> According to Italian sources, on Faitlovitch's fourth expedition to Ethiopia in 1919, for example, there were fierce arguments among members of the group which included his brother and a physician from Jerusalem, Dr. Entin, about the "deceitful and brutal manner" of Faitlovitch. Entin described Faitlovitch as a "vulgar adventurer" and criticised his "cruel and inhumane conduct." He saw no point in his educational programme and concluded that he was a "charlatan who for his own personal reasons has shown to the Jews of Europe and especially America that the life of the Falashas was a life of slavery and of sorrow which ... does not correspond to the truth." (Report of Piacentini of the 'Regia Legazione d'Italia in Etiopia' on the 'Missione Faitlovitch in Etiopia' to the Foreign Affairs Minister in Rome, 18 December 1920, file no. 2947, ASMAE). Faitlovitch's brother also objected to his methods and aims and was subsequently physically threatened by Faitlovitch. (Report from an Italian commercial agent, Paulicelli, to the 'Regia Legazione d'Italia in Etiopia,' 3 October 1920, file no. 2976, ASMAI). The disputes and arguments among the members of Faitlovitch's group were also recalled in an interview with Yona Boggalä. (29 January 1987).

difficulties in obtaining foreign protection for his proposed schools.<sup>131</sup> Sixthly, Faitlovitch was frequently criticised for his arrogant and conceited manner which undoubtedly created opposition to his programme among the Falashas, Ethiopian leaders and representatives of Jewish organisations.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> The Italian colonial officials based in Asmara were reluctant to assist Faitlovitch with his programme. They realised that his proposed plan to study Cushitic languages in Ethiopia was inconsistent with the programme he was carrying out among the Falashas. (Ostini to Raggi, Governor of Eritrea, 22 November 1912, posiz 54/1, file no. 24, ASMAE and Piacentini to the Foreign Minister, Rome, 28 July 1920, file no. 2976, ASMAI). They believed that to "help or protect a Jewish mission" with its "religious propaganda" would be "contrary to [their] political and economic interests" in Ethiopia. (Ostini to Raggi, 22 November 1912). The officials further asserted that Faitlovitch's methods had the same "inconveniences that all religious missions have" since there "will arise the danger of discord among rural populations." (Raggi to Minister of Colonies, Rome, 11 January 1913, file no. 24, ASMAE) and an increased animosity towards the Italians. (Piacentini to the Foreign Minister, 28 July 1920). Likewise, British officials were also disinclined to assist Faitlovitch by placing his schools under British protection.. They claimed that "as Dr. Faitlovitch [was] displeasing to Ras Taffari and as it would be unwise to risk friction with the Abyssinian Government ... any plea for diplomatic support ... should be refused." (C. Russell of British Consulate in Addis Ababa, 17 March 1921, PRO, file no. 371/5508). They, in fact, believed that "the Abyssinian government (was) sensitive about anything in the nature of foreign religious activity in their country." What is more, as there was "no British interest involved in the orthodoxy of Falasha Judaism," (Russell to Earl Curzon of Kedleston, 17 March 1921, PRO, file no. FO 371/5508) they declared "it was not evident why H.M.G should undertake the protection of an institution whose propaganda might be obnoxious to the Abyssinian government." (R. Sperling to Russell, 19 April 1922, PRO, file no. FO 371/7150).

<sup>132</sup> In an interview, Yona Boggalä described how Faitlovitch, following a night of prayer on 'Yom Kippur,' told Abba Barok "the Holy One is not deaf, why are you shouting, a little slower, he'll hear." Yona Boggalä also discussed an occasion when an Ethiopian official would not allow Faitlovitch's party to pass through Gondar without paying tax. Faitlovitch refused and became so enraged that

A further reason for Faitlovitch's failure can be attributed to the fact that many Falashas who initially appeared to have supported Faitlovitch were attracted to his camp primarily due to the unique opportunities to study, to possess a copy of a Bible or booklet,<sup>133</sup> and the medical facilities which became available with Faitlovitch's arrival. Although many appeared enthusiastic about the appearance of Faitlovitch in their midst, most were reluctant to abandon their practises or adopt new ones. The excitement generated by Faitlovitch's expeditions and the services he provided was understandably misinterpreted by him as a desire on their part to join his programme.<sup>134</sup>

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he took a large whip and began to beat him. (Interview with Yona Boggalä, 29 January 1987). Ben Ze'ev, who wrote the preface to Faitlovitch's *Journey to the Falashas*, asserted that he spoke before the Ethiopian governors and emperors as if "he was an envoy of a country and not a man without a country or army behind him." (p.17.) Finally, although Ben Ze'ev expressed his opposition to Faitlovitch's programme, Faitlovitch replied "I have heard your words. I do not agree with them. You have to go with me. I define the direction." (p.23). He subsequently assigned tasks to Ben Ze'ev without asking if he was available or prepared to participate in his programme. (p.24). It is reasonable to assume that Faitlovitch behaved in a similar fashion towards other people.

<sup>133</sup> As we have seen with the missionaries, the desire to possess the written word was very strong among the Falashas, as indeed with all Ethiopians. (See *JMI*, December 1927). Although the majority of Falashas were illiterate, many were eager to possess a book as a symbol of prestige. During the course of my fieldwork, I also came across many Falashas who were very proud to show me their copy of one of Faitlovitch's publications. However, in the majority of cases, they were unable to read.

<sup>134</sup> Missionary reports also revealed that although the missionaries received many visitors, the majority in fact came for educational purposes. (See *JMI*, December 1927).

Finally, one aspect of Faitlovitch's programme which has not yet been examined is the impact of Faitlovitch on Western Jewish communities. As we have seen at the beginning of the previous chapter, part of Faitlovitch's programme was to educate the Jewish world about the Falashas. The full results will be analysed in Chapter 7 but it is sufficient to state here that his propaganda among the Falashas and Western Jewish centres, prior to 1935, did produce the groundwork for his return to Ethiopia in 1941 and the resumption of Pro-Falasha activities.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE IMPACT OF THE ITALIAN OCCUPATION OF ETHIOPIA ON THE FALASHAS<sup>1</sup>

The Italian fascist occupation of Ethiopia from 1935-41 has been described as a "turning point in Ethiopia's long history" which "spelt the end of the classic Ethiopia of former times."<sup>2</sup> Despite its comparative brevity, Mussolini's occupation of Ethiopia is considered by most scholars to have had severe repercussions on both the country and peoples of Ethiopia.<sup>3</sup> A superficial examination of Mussolini's oppressive policies has also led contemporary researchers<sup>4</sup> to conclude that the Falashas

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the Second International Congress of the Society for the Study of Ethiopian Jewry, Jerusalem, May 1995.

<sup>2</sup> R. Pankhurst, 'Economic Verdict on the Italian Occupation of Ethiopia,' *Ethiopia Observer*, vol.14, 1971, p.82.

<sup>3</sup> See A. Sbacchi, *Ethiopia Under Mussolini: Fascism and the Colonial Experience*, (London, 1985); R. Pankhurst, 'Fascist Racial Policies in Ethiopia 1922-41,' *Ethiopia Observer*, volume 12, 1969, pp. 270-286; Pankhurst, 'Economic Verdict,' pp. 68-82; R. Pankhurst, 'The Secret History of the Italian Fascist Occupation of Ethiopia 1935-41,' *African Quarterly*, volume 16, 1977, pp. 35-86; L. Goglia, 'Note sul Razzismo Coloniale Fascista,' *Storia Contemporanea*, volume 19, (6), 1988, pp. 1223-1269; A. Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War*, (Chicago, 1969), pp. 212-252; Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale: La Caduta dell'Impero*, (Rome, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> See Kessler, *Falashas*, p. 146; Messing, *Story*, pp. 60-72; E. Isaac, 'Jewish Solidarity and the Jews of Europe' in B. Pinkus et al., (eds.), *Organising Rescue*, (London 1992), p. 408; S. Kaplan, 'A Brief History of the Beta Israel' in Avner et al., (eds.), *The Jews of Ethiopia*, pp. 21-22; Waldman, *Beyond the Rivers*, pp. 226-227; M. Corinaldi, *Ethiopian Jewry: Identity and Transition*, (Jerusalem, 1989), pp. 20-22; E. Trevisan Semi, 'The Dainelli and Viterbo Missions among the Falashas (1936-37)'

were persecuted severely during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia for being not only Ethiopian but Jewish as well.<sup>5</sup>

#### Italian Fascism in Ethiopia<sup>6</sup>

According to Alberto Sbacchi, Italian fascism has been criticised more than the other major colonial powers because of its rigour and lack of sympathy for the needs of the subject people.<sup>7</sup> As the fascists were convinced that they had to deal with an entirely uncivilized population in Ethiopia, the Italian administrators had instructions to impose the ideals of fascism<sup>8</sup> upon the Ethiopians. This meant "a direct rule and a refusal to govern through local headmen, even when over so large an area as Ethiopia this might signify no government at all."<sup>9</sup>

None the less, Alessandro Lessona, the minister of colonies and chief fascist theoretician at the time, stated in 1936

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in Kaplan et al., (eds.), *Between Africa and Zion*, pp. 72-79.

<sup>5</sup> The fascists' attitude towards the Falashas' religion and identity will be discussed below.

<sup>6</sup> The empire which the Italian fascists formed was named Africa Orientale Italiana (AOI) or Italian East Africa. It also comprised the Italian colonies of Eritrea and Somaliland. For an analysis of the structure of this colonial empire, see Bahru Zewde, *History of Modern Ethiopia*, (London, 1991), pp.162-3.

<sup>7</sup> Sbacchi, *Ethiopia*, p.234.

<sup>8</sup> For an analysis of the philosophy of fascism see S.G. Payne, 'The Concept of Fascism,' in S. Larsen, *Who Were the Fascists?*, (Bergen, 1980), pp.14-51.

<sup>9</sup> Sbacchi, *Ethiopia*, p.236.

that "fascist rule does not mean that we wish to carry out a policy of repression against the local chiefs who have submitted and cooperated loyally with us."<sup>10</sup> He also declared, however, that the populations must at every moment have the clear feeling that they depend exclusively on Italian authority. Lessona concluded that "personal relations with Ethiopian Chiefs should likewise be marked by the maximum courtesy and tact but with the total and absolute exclusion of any act that might be interpreted as a recognition of a prestige and authority which were definitely destroyed by our victory."<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, other fascist declarations made at the start of the occupation gave the initial impression that the Italians were inclined to grant all native citizens of Ethiopia full cultural and religious freedom. Statements were made to the effect that absolute respect for religions and local traditions were guaranteed for everyone as long as they did not interfere with public order or conflict with general principles of civility.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Telegram from Lessona to Graziani, 15 June 1936, as quoted in Pankhurst, 'The Secret History,' p.42.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> See article 31 of 'Staff regulations of the Italian Empire of Eastern Africa,' file no.46, Italian State Archives. Mussolini also declared that "i popoli dell'Etiopia saranno governati dalle legge di Roma con forza, giustizia ed umanità ed attraverso l'azione del Fascismo verranno elevati e migliorate le condizioni di vita delle popolazioni etiopiche." (reported on Rome radio, 8 February 1937, file no.46, Italian State Archives. Finally, in an article on the various religions in Ethiopia, Lessona wrote that "la loro religione è



The apparently benevolent attitude adopted towards all Ethiopians in the early stage of the occupation can, however, be understood in the context of fascist propaganda, both in Italy and abroad. As Pankhurst notes, "the Italians were at the time making great play with Italy's assumed 'civilising mission' in Africa and could not afford any revelations of a franker racial attitude towards subject peoples."<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, as the occupation continued, the position of some natives of Ethiopia under fascist rule gradually grew worse. It would appear that after the occupation of Addis Ababa in May 1936, Italian colonial policy became much more openly racist. In one of Mussolini's famous speeches, he said "empires are conquered by arms but kept by prestige." In order to uphold Italian prestige in Ethiopia, the fascists deemed it necessary to separate the whites and blacks of the colony to ensure that the purity of blood of Italian immigrants to Ethiopia would not become polluted by miscegenation.<sup>14</sup>

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rispettata da tutti - massima libertà del culto non solo, ma concreto l'interessamento delle nostre autorità per tutto ciò che è elevazione morale e spirituale della popolazione suddita." (no date, file no.47, Italian State Archives).

<sup>13</sup> Pankhurst, 'Fascist Racial Policies,' p.273. Dino Grandi, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time of the occupation of Ethiopia, described Italy's invasion of the country as a "mission to civilize the black continent." (D. Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, (New York, 1976), p.59).

<sup>14</sup> See Pankhurst, 'Fascist Racial Policies,' pp.270-286. From early 1937, racist articles began to appear regularly in the Italian press and colonial publications.

In 1938, Italy decided to embark on a full scale racist campaign. Mussolini declared at this time that Italian prestige required a clear and strict racial consciousness in Ethiopia which would not only establish differentiation but demonstrate the clearest superiority.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, since fascism called for the rule of force and racial policy advocated the inferiority of the colonial people, a military role was adopted to administer Ethiopia whereby racial concepts of Italian superiority were enforced with military discipline. A systematic policy of terror and extermination was in fact employed which often resulted in acts of extreme cruelty and many massacres of innocent Ethiopians.<sup>16</sup>

#### Fascism and the Jews of Italy<sup>17</sup>

Initially, the advent of fascism brought no visible deterioration to the position of the Jews living in Italy. As was the case in Ethiopia, the fascists made many statements which suggested that the rights of the Jews were

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In April 1937, the first racial decree was ordered by King Vittorio Emanuele III which prohibited conjugal relations between Italian citizens and colonial subjects of Ethiopia.

<sup>15</sup> Mussolini in *Etiopia*, vol.2, (11-12), p.2 as quoted in Pankhurst, 'Fascist Racial Policies,' p.281.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Sbacchi, *Ethiopia*, pp.184-197.

<sup>17</sup> Several scholarly books have been written on this subject. The most noteworthy are M. Michaelis, *Mussolini e la Questione Ebraica: Le Relazioni Italo-tedesche e la Politica Razziale in Italia*, (Milan, 1982); R. de Felice, *Storia degli Ebrei Sotto il Fascismo*, (Turin, 1961); M. Michaelis, *Mussolini and the Jews*, (Oxford, 1978).

to be protected under the fascist regime. Indeed, from 1922 to 1937, the official attitude of the fascist government to the Jews was summarily expressed in the phrase "the Jewish problem does not exist in Italy" since there was no distinction made between Jews and non-Jews either in the political or social spheres.<sup>18</sup> However, once again Mussolini's statements and promises were proven to be false. From 1938, he also embarked on a full-scale racist program against the Italian Jews as a result of which they were severely persecuted.<sup>19</sup>

#### Italian Fascism and the Falashas.

The first edition of the fascist racist journal *La Difesa*

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<sup>18</sup> At a Jewish student meeting in the United States in the autumn of 1935, Mussolini declared that "fascism does not desire that Jewry should renounce its religious traditions, its ritual usages, its national memories or its racial peculiarities. Fascism desires only that Jews should recognise the national ideals of Italy accepting the discipline of national unity. In Italy no difference exists between Jews and non-Jews in the political or social spheres. For many years the Italian Jews have taken an active part in the political, scientific and artistic life of Italy. In a word, a Jewish question does not exist in Italy. I, at least, do not know of one. Whenever I have detected the faintest trace of antisemitic discrimination in the life of the State, I have at once suppressed it. Whatever the foes of fascism may say, we are tolerant to all. Neither I nor any exponent of the (fascist) regime has ever experienced anti-Jewish views." (Cited in Michaelis, *Mussolini*, p.83).

<sup>19</sup> According to Michaelis, "Mussolini was to state in both public and private that ... Jewish opposition to his African venture had opened his eyes to the Jewish peril and that the anti-Jewish measures adopted in 1938 were no more than a logical extension to Italy of the racial laws he had previously enacted in Ethiopia." (Michaelis, *Mussolini*, p.101). See also C. Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, (Philadelphia, 1946), p.518 and R. de Felice, *Storia degli Ebrei*, chapter 5.

*Della Razza*<sup>20</sup> bore on its front cover the head of a Roman statue separated from caricatures of a Jew and an African by a sword. This crude portrayal of Italian racist philosophy brings into question the fascists' attitude adopted towards the Falashas during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia. Since the fascist regime became both antisemitic and racist, how did it react to the Falashas who were considered to be 'black Jews'<sup>21</sup> by the Italians and therefore the combination of two alleged inferior races?

In order to assess the impact of the Italian fascist occupation on the Falashas, it will first be necessary to examine the policies of the fascists concerning this minority in Ethiopia.<sup>22</sup> Secondly, the effect that the

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<sup>20</sup> The first edition of this journal appeared on 5 August 1938.

<sup>21</sup> During the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, the Falashas were categorically defined by fascist politicians and ethnologists as 'I Ebrei di Etiopia.' See, for example, C. Calosso, 'I Falascia,' *La Difesa della Razza*, vol. 17, (22), 1939, pp. 17-19 in which the writer concludes "la loro fisionomia è inconfondibilmente giudaica." See also Trevisan Semi, 'Dainelli and Viterbo Missions,' pp. 72-79 and in particular, Trevisan Semi, *Allo Specchio dei Falascia: Ebrei ed Etnologi durante il Colonialismo Fascista*, (Florence, 1987), pp. 75-89.

<sup>22</sup> The archival collections consulted for this chapter include: Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Rome; Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (ASMAE), Rome; Archivio Storico del Ministero dell'Africa Italiana (ASMAI), Foreign Ministry, Rome; Archivio Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiana (AUCII), Rome; Faitlovitch Collection (FC), Tel Aviv University; Central Archives for The History of the Jewish People (CAHJP), Jerusalem; Archives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC), New York.

occupation together with these policies had on the Falashas will be analysed.<sup>23</sup> Finally, we will be able to ascertain if in fact, as Tamrat Imanuél and others have maintained, during the occupation the Falashas were "deux fois réprouvés, d'abord parce qu'ils sont noirs, ensuite parce qu'ils sont juifs."<sup>24</sup>

Upon the invasion of Ethiopia by the Italians commencing in October 1935, the fascists strove to give the impression that the Falashas were going to be among the beneficiaries of Italy's so-called civilising mission in that country and be granted equal rights accordingly.<sup>25</sup> The Italian official

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<sup>23</sup> Due to the relatively recent occurrence of these events, it was possible to use oral sources to supplement the afore-mentioned written documentation and especially to analyse the Falashas' experience during the fascist occupation. This oral documentation was collated during a year long fieldwork expedition to Israel in 1995. The interviews were mainly conducted with elderly members of the Falasha community who were able to recall the period of the Italian occupation. I tried to concentrate on those who had not been subjected to Western European Jewish propaganda which has tended to misconstrue the impact that the fascist occupation had upon the Falashas.

<sup>24</sup> Tamrat Emanuel, 'En Exil au Caire, Un Représentant Authentique des Falachas d'Abyssinie,' *La Bourse Égyptienne*, 27 November 1938.

<sup>25</sup> Prior to the invasion, the Italian Secretary of State declared that "il Regio Governo avrebbe considerato con simpatia il movimento in favore degli ebrei in Abissinia che versano attualmente in così tristi condizioni di soggezione." (12 September 1935, Missione Falasha-Dr. Faitlovitch, Etiopia-Fondo di Guerra, sottof. 3, pos.54, file no.139, ASMAE). This was despite the fact that, in the same letter, he denied Faitlovitch permission to return to Ethiopia due to the latter's desire to "fare opera di propaganda sionista fra questi Falascia, per cercare di ricondurli al vero ebraismo." See F. Del Canuto, 'Come si Giunse alla Missione in Etiopia Presso i Falascia,' *Israel - Un Decennio 1974-84 - Saggi sull'Ebraismo Italiano*, (Rome, 1984), p.32.

circles at that time tried to demonstrate the alleged sympathetic stance adopted towards the Falashas and to clarify that they would receive, once the country was completely conquered, better treatment than under Haile Sellassie. This was exemplified in a conference held in February 1936 in Rome, when Professor Conti Rossini addressed an appeal to the Italian Jews. He urged them to support the intentions of the government as he declared that "Italy, after conquering Abyssinia would take the most benevolent interest in the moral and the material welfare of the Falashas." To those "who will be privileged to become her subjects" he stated, "Italy will guarantee security, peace and tranquillity in the exercise of their cult, which is the basis of every truly civilised state."<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, Dr. Mareno, an official in the Ministry of Africa stated that "the Falashas have nothing to be afraid of from Italy. Not only has there never been antisemitism in Italy and our country has always shown every sympathy and care towards the Jews of her colonies, but these same Falashas should remember that the International Committee for Falashas was formed in 1906 in Florence and that the present director of the school in Addis, Tamrat Emanuel, was educated in Italy."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Anon., 'Report on the Falashas,' Rome, 12 October 1937, FC no.127. See also Trevisan Semi, *Allo Specchio*, p.81.

<sup>27</sup> M. Mareno, 'Appunto Sui Falascia,' 21 September 1935, file no. 139, ASMAE.

Statements such as these seem to suggest that the Falashas were to be treated by the fascists as a minority in Ethiopia to whom special treatment would be granted.<sup>28</sup> But were these apparent pro-Falasha declarations, as Trevisan Semi states, merely a political "management of an illusion,"<sup>29</sup> that formed an "integral part of Mussolini's complex cynical and contradictory political manoeuvring"?<sup>30</sup>

With the arrival of the Italians in Addis Ababa, the cordiality previously shown towards the Falashas was extended further to include practical demonstrations of this positive attitude. Despite the initial pillage of Addis Ababa with the Italian occupation of the city, the Faitlovitch school suffered no damage<sup>31</sup> and more importantly Tamrat Imanuél, the school's director, received a subsidy of 3000 Lire from a high-ranking Italian

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<sup>28</sup> As mentioned previously, an examination of other declarations made at the start of the occupation, give the impression that the fascists were very much in favour of granting all native citizens of Ethiopia full cultural and religious freedom. (See page 215).

<sup>29</sup> Trevisan Semi, *Allo Specchio*, p. 73.

<sup>30</sup> Trevisan Semi, 'Dainelli and Viterbo Missions,' p.72. Indeed, she claims that the treatment of the Falashas by Mussolini was "consistent with the unscrupulous way he acted towards Jews in general." (p. 73).

<sup>31</sup> Communication from E. Solomon, Treasurer of American Pro-Falasha Committee to Faitlovitch, 14 May 1936, on receiving information from the American Legation in Addis Ababa via a telegram from Cordell Hull, Secretary of State of the United States. (FC no.127). See also I. Grinfeld, 'The Jewish School in Addis Ababa at the Beginning of the Italian Occupation 1936-7,' *Dor Le'dor*, vol. 5, March 1992, pp. 51-83.

official.<sup>32</sup> This sum was intended to alleviate the initial hardships which the pupils and their teachers were experiencing whilst funds from foreign Jewish pro-Falasha organisations were unable to reach the school.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, only a month after the proclamation of Italian sovereignty over Ethiopia, the fascist government agreed<sup>34</sup> to an official request from the Italian Jewish community to send one of its representatives, the advocate, Carlo Alberto Viterbo, to Ethiopia.<sup>35</sup> Among the tasks assigned to

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<sup>32</sup> Communication from Felice di L. Ravenna, President of the Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane to Members of the Union Council and Presidents of the Community, Prot. 2041, 21 September 1936, FC no.127.

<sup>33</sup> See C.A. Viterbo, 'Relazione al Ministero dell'Africa Italiana dell'opera svolta in A.O.I. in rappresentanza dell'Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiana,' *Israele, 'Un Decennio' 1974-1984*, Rome, 1984, p.50.

<sup>34</sup> On 2 July 1936, the Minister of Colonies wrote to the Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane to approve of a programme to send Viterbo to organise the "nuclei israelitici di Addis Abeba e Dire Dawa ed all'opera di studio, di educazione e di assistenza da svolgere nei riguardi dei Falascia." (Unione Comunità Israelitiche Italiane-Falasha Mission 1936-41, Invent. Affari Politici, elenco 3, cartone 74, fasc. 199, ASMAI).

<sup>35</sup> Italian Minister of the Colonies to the Italian Jewish Community, 2 July 1936, file no. 199, ASMAI. This permission was granted to Viterbo as a policy was adopted which excluded "molteplici sospette iniziative di centri israelitici stranieri" concerning the Falashas. Instead, the Minister of Colonies recommended "svolgere azione diretto verso Falascia a mezzo Comunità Israelita Italiana." (Minister of Colonies to Ministry of Press and Propaganda, 30 May 1936, file no.139, ASMAE). This rule also applied to non-Jewish organisations such as missionary societies since "in genere poi occorre non (dico non) concedere attuale momento autorizzazioni a stranieri entrare in Etiopia salvo casi eccezionali." (Ministry of Colonies, 30 April 1936, file no.199, ASMAI).



him by the Italian Jewish community would be to "approach the Falashas, in order to understand their conditions and needs and to act accordingly."<sup>36</sup> It would seem that he was given every assistance possible by the Italian officials to carry out his plans.<sup>37</sup> They were indeed eager to display their alleged admiration of the Falashas and their readiness to assist him whenever possible.<sup>38</sup>

In fact, on 19 September 1936 during Viterbo's mission, a decree was made by a fascist official declaring the establishment of a Jewish community in Addis Ababa. This

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<sup>36</sup> Ravenna to the Ministry of the Colonies, 18 June 1936, file no. 199, ASMAI. See also Viterbo in 'Relazione,' p. 47. It was originally suggested that "il Governo Italiano potrebbe far cosa utile incoraggiando il viaggio, diciamo turistico, in Etiopia di un gruppo di ebrei italiani nel Tigre occupato, per diffondere tra i Falascia la convinzione della benevola attitudine che tiene l'Italia verso i suoi sudditi di confessione ebraica." (Corrado Tedeschi, "a trusted Jewish fascist" who was charged with "the task of winning over prominent liberal and right-wing Zionists in Palestine" (Michaelis, *Mussolini*, p.85) to Raffaele Guariglia (head of the Special Office for the Ethiopian Question), 6 February 1936, as quoted in R. De Felice, *Storia*, p.589).

<sup>37</sup> The unrestricted assistance granted to assist Viterbo's expedition contradicted an earlier communication from the Minister of Colonies. In a telegram dated 6 August 1936 to the Governors of Harar, Asmara and Gondar, he declared that Viterbo "dovra limitare sua attivita a quanto strettamente necessario per assolvere suo compito localita predette e restare quindi in A.O. tempo minimo indispensabile" (file no.199, ASMAI). This telegram was sent following a communication received from the Ministry of the Interior which alleged that "Viterbo é un convinto e tenace assertore del movimento sionistico e ... non va considerato di sentimenti ligi al Regime." (29 July 1936, file no.199, ASMAI).

<sup>38</sup> See Viterbo 'Relazione,' pp. 52-60 for an account of the favourable attitudes of Italian officials taken towards the Falashas.

would consist of Falashas and foreign Jews and would be under the supervision of Viterbo.<sup>39</sup> Secondly, Viterbo's plan to transfer and transform the Falasha school in Addis Ababa to an agricultural and technical school in Gondar,<sup>40</sup> where most Falashas lived,<sup>41</sup> was met with a favourable reception by most Italian officials that he met in Ethiopia.<sup>42</sup>

Viterbo considered the "most important and attractive part of his mission" to be a visit to the Falasha localities.<sup>43</sup> During this expedition, he intended to "dissipate the [Falashas'] unfounded doubts and fears" concerning the new state of affairs in the country, reassure them of the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. pp. 63-66.

<sup>40</sup> Viterbo was opposed to Faitlovitch's aim to 'transform' the lives of the Falashas. (See Viterbo's statement cited in Trevisan Semi, 'Dainelli and Viterbo Missions,' p.78). Rather, Viterbo claimed he intended to 'improve' their lives by training them to become better agriculturalists and livestock breeders which could not be accomplished if the school was located in Addis Ababa. (Viterbo, 'Relazione,' pp. 88-89).

<sup>41</sup> Viterbo, 'Relazione,' pp. 87-90. Viterbo considered this plan "to be one of his main interests of the mission." (p.89). He was adamant to transfer the school from Addis Ababa to Gondar as a) the pupils who were located at the school in Addis Ababa were far from their families; b) there were several pupils in Addis Ababa, aged between 20 and 30, who were not able to marry due to a lack of eligible spouses; c) Viterbo considered it unfavourable that the Falashas were detached from their natural habitat.

<sup>42</sup> For example, in a meeting with Pirzio Biroli, the Governor of Asmara, on 3 January 1937, Viterbo was given "l'assicurazione ... che si sarebbe cercato di assegnare un terreno a tale scopo." (Ibid., p.80).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.68.

Italians' honourable intentions and encourage their "collaborazione fedele al nuovo regime."<sup>44</sup> Therefore, with Tamrat Imanuél as a guide and interpreter, Viterbo set off to visit various Falasha villages in the Gondar region.

On his travels, Viterbo related to the inhabitants of these villages the assistance granted to him by the Italian authorities. He maintained that the Falashas should consider themselves "une frazione privilegiata fra tutte le frazioni dell'Impero" since Viterbo was permitted to visit and assist them.<sup>45</sup> He also attempted to allay the Falashas' alleged fears of the Italians by dispelling the rumours prevalent in their villages.<sup>46</sup> Viterbo asserted that a belief in the allegations against the Italians would hinder any proposed assistance offered to the Falashas by the fascists "nell'opera di civilizzazione che l'Italia si

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.82. Viterbo viewed this allegiance as vital to ensure that the Italians would continue with their benevolent attitude towards the Falashas and co-operate with the Italian Jewish community for their welfare. (p.79).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.77. It should be recalled that most foreign organisations, both Jewish and non-Jewish, were denied entry into Ethiopia during the Italian occupation.

<sup>46</sup> One such rumour was that the invitation for the natives to work in road construction was a trap whereby those who were employed by the Italians would be transported far away, dressed as soldiers and forced to fight the patriots. (Ibid., p.79). Viterbo, in fact, obtained an assurance from Birolì on 3 January 1937 that the Falashas employed in road construction would not have to work on the Sabbath and that such work was considered "del tutto libero e volontario e non obbligatorio." (Ibid., p.80).

propone."<sup>47</sup>

It is therefore not surprising to learn that several Falasha leaders initially appeared to have supported the Italian regime in Ethiopia. Indeed, in 1936, they presented to the Italian Governor of Ethiopia, a declaration of loyalty and faithfulness to the fascist regime.<sup>48</sup> The Italian Jewish community was equally impressed with the fascists' apparent intentions concerning the Falashas and presented a Sefer Torah to the Jewish community of Addis Ababa in the name of "Il Duce Benito Mussolini."<sup>49</sup> These

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.80.

<sup>48</sup> *L'Azione Coloniale*, 25-26 August 1936, p.3. (See also Del Canuto, 'Come si Giunse,' pp.41-2). Viterbo also wrote that "i Falascia sono grati al nuovo regime che li libera dalle antiche vessazioni et da loro libertà di culto et possibilità di miglioramento economico et si dispongono at fare del loro meglio per l'incremento dei lavori agricoli ed artigiani ai quali sono dediti. Essi attendono con piena fiducia et fedeltà di essere aiutati ad elevare la loro cultura et preparazione professionale." (As cited in communication from General Governor of Italian East Africa to Ministry of the Colonies, 26 January 1937, file no.199, ASMAI). Finally, in an undated letter sent from several Falasha notables to Tamrat Imanuél, they claimed that "le Autorita ci hanno ricevuto con gioia." (cited in a letter from Ravenna to the Presidents of Italian Jewish communities, 24 November 1936, AUCII).

<sup>49</sup> G. Recanti, President of the Jewish Community of Rome to all Italian Jews, October 1936, file no. IT 807, CAHJP. What is more, the Italian Jewish community was quick to come to the defense of Mussolini or the fascist regime whenever they were verbally attacked by foreign Jewish organisations or individuals. For example, following an anti-fascist sermon by the Rabbi of the Saint Louis Jewish community, Ravenna wrote that "he [the Rabbi] does not realise what blessing will be to the Abyssinians the huge work of civilization that Italy has already started with the full approval of the natives. Especially Jews all over the world should be grateful to the Italian Premier for the entrance of the important Falashas people into civilized world." (Ravenna to the Jewish Federation of St. Louis, 9

acts of allegiance were received favourably by the fascist regime which assured the Falashas "not only of protection ... equal to other populations and religions but also of [their] particular interest ... for this hard-working and peaceful minority."<sup>50</sup>

Following Viterbo's mission, the attitude of the fascists towards the Falashas appears to have remained positive for some time. In October 1937, for example, official authorization was granted by the Governor of Addis Ababa to establish an agricultural-technical school in the Gondar region, as recommended by Viterbo.<sup>51</sup>

However, it later emerged in 1938 that the reason for granting permission to the Falashas to establish this school in Gondar was to avoid their coming into contact with non-Falasha Jews. This was a principle which, according to one fascist official, was against the "prestige of race."<sup>52</sup> Then, in November 1938, Teruzzi issued a policy entitled 'Politics of race - the Jews in

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July 1936, AUCII).

<sup>50</sup> Viterbo 'Relazione', p.52. See also telegram sent by G. Ciano, Minister of Propaganda to the Italian Consulates of London, Paris, Washington, Cairo and Cape Town, 22 August 1936, file no.139, ASMAE.

<sup>51</sup> A. Lessona, Minister of Colonies to the Governors of Addis Ababa and Gondar, 11 October 1937 and to the Governor of Italian East Africa, 14 October 1937, file no. 199, ASMAI.

<sup>52</sup> A. Teruzzi, Minister of Africa to the Governor of Addis Ababa, 21 July 1938, entitled 'Ebrei in A.O.I. Falascia,' file no.199, ASMAI.

Italian East Africa' in which the racist terminology that was directed towards the Falashas in the aforementioned document, reappeared. He stated that the policy issued regarding the Jews in general rendered a prompt examination of the necessary action and he drew the following conclusions-:

(1) Firstly, the opportunity to establish in Addis Ababa, one community of Italian, Yemenite and Falasha Jews was no longer a possibility.

(2) Secondly, although the plan to establish a Falasha agricultural-technical school in Gondar was not abandoned, the minister did not consider it suitable to teach in it elements of Talmudic Judaism which was for the purpose of inculcating the Falashas with concepts of traditional Judaism.<sup>53</sup> The teachers, instead, should be natives of Ethiopia and for the agricultural-technical tuition, Italian Christians.

(3) Thirdly, Teruzzi stated that officially "one need not talk of a Jewish religion of Abyssinia, but simply of a free Falasha religion, like other religions of Ethiopia."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Teruzzi declared that the Falashas "professano una religione così diversa dall'Ebraismo" as although they are faithful to the precepts of the Old Testament, "essi ignorano radicalmente le istituzioni talmudiche, che costituiscono l'essenza dell'Ebraismo europeo." Since they also were not familiar with Hebrew, he claimed that some people had in fact doubts "che essi siano israeliti."

<sup>54</sup> Teruzzi to the Governor of Addis Ababa, 3 November 1938, file no. 199, ASMAI. (See Del Canuto, 'I Falascia fra politica antisemita e politica razziale,' *Storia*

For the above reasons, the Minister of Africa no longer allowed the involvement of foreign Jewish organisations in the affairs of the Falashas.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, all future requests by representatives of Jewish organisations, including those from Viterbo, to visit or assist the Falashas were subsequently rejected.<sup>56</sup> Hence, from then on until the end of the occupation, the destiny and welfare of the Falashas were entirely in the hands of the fascists.

Nevertheless, the establishment of the Falasha school in Gondar and the issue of the Falashas in general seem to have been neglected thereafter by the Italians. It was only in December 1940, following an enquiry from the Ambassador of the United States,<sup>57</sup> that we learn that "the Falasha school in Addis Abeba had been disbanded ... to be substituted eventually with an agricultural school in Gondar,"<sup>58</sup> an institution which in fact never materialised.

In addition, it would appear that the above statement regarding the closure of the Addis Ababa school was

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*Contemporanea*, volume 19, (6), December 1988, pp.1282-3).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> In 1940, Teruzzi declared that "il problema dei Falascia è un problema esclusivamente nostro." (Teruzzi to Governor of Italian East Africa, 5 December 1940, file no.199, ASMAI).

<sup>57</sup> Foreign Ministry to Minister of Italian East Africa, 17 November 1940, file no.199, ASMAI.

<sup>58</sup> Communication from Teruzzi, 5 December 1940, file no. 199, ASMAI.

incorrect. Faitlovitch wrote just a short time before that the "educational activities of the school are thus far not prohibited .... and the school still keeps open its doors" albeit "maintained by pupils working in the town."<sup>59</sup> Moreover, on the liberation of Addis Ababa in 1941, Faitlovitch received a letter from the American Consulate General in Palestine, the contents of which lead one to conclude that the school in the capital was never forced to close its gates during the Italian occupation.<sup>60</sup>

Therefore, according to the documents examined, there does not seem to have been a systematic policy of discrimination and persecution against the Falashas during the fascist occupation. Even in the years following the official implementation of racist policy both in Ethiopia and Italy and despite the fact that 'Ethiopian Judaism' was effectively disbanded, this popular interpretation would appear to be inaccurate. Instead, it is evident that their legal status under the fascists was the same if not better

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<sup>59</sup> Faitlovitch to H. Reit, Chairman of the American Pro-Falasha Committee, 9 May 1939, FC no.127.

<sup>60</sup> L.C. Pinkerton, American Consul General, to Faitlovitch, 12 December 1941, FC no.127. Cf. letter sent from Faitlovitch in Addis Ababa to Lewis Bato of the Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg, 9 October 1942, in which he declares "our school is ruined, the pupils are scattered, many of them missing or lost and those left in utterly despairing conditions." (FC no.100) See Trevisan Semi, 'Educational Activity,' p.96. Faitlovitch's statement was undoubtedly exaggerated to gain sympathy for the Falashas.



than other ethnic groups in Ethiopia<sup>61</sup> and that they were even at times granted extra benefits.

The positive attitude reflected in policies towards the Falashas can in fact be seen as a tool employed by Mussolini for various propaganda purposes and political gains. By the Italians' ostensibly protecting the Falashas, they hoped it would serve their interests in the following ways:-

Firstly, by appearing to work closely with the Italian Jewish community and by favouring the Jews of Ethiopia, it would allay fears of Italian antisemitism expressed by Jewish organisations across the world, and especially in the United States. This, they hoped, would in turn help to cancel sanctions imposed upon them by the United States government as they believed the Jews to have an influence on American political life.<sup>62</sup> It is therefore of no surprise to observe that events such as the Falashas' 'declaration of loyalty' to the fascist regime and Viterbo's mission

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<sup>61</sup> It should be noted that the Oromo and the Moslems were treated favourably by the fascists throughout the occupation. See Sbacchi, *Ethiopia*, pp.160-165.

<sup>62</sup> In a letter from the Italian Ambassador to America to the Italian Foreign Minister, the issue of "la grande importanza che gli ebrei hanno nella vita americano" was discussed. The Ambassador therefore suggested that in order to combat the anti-Italian feeling prevalent amongst American Jews, all information that could contradict the accusations of Italian antisemitism should be publicised widely. (13 July 1936, file no.139, ASMAE).

were publicised widely throughout the world by the Italian propaganda machine.<sup>63</sup>

Secondly, it would allow Mussolini's plan to settle European Jews in Ethiopia<sup>64</sup> in areas inhabited by Falashas to be given a favourable reception.<sup>65</sup> This rather obscure plan was discussed on several occasions by Mussolini who stated that "the universal Jewish problem can only be resolved in one way: by the creation in some part of the world, not in Palestine, of a Jewish State."<sup>66</sup> He believed Ethiopia to be the ideal place and that the native 'Jewish' population in the country should be given extra benefits to attract

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<sup>63</sup> Following the decision to allow Viterbo to enter Ethiopia, a telegram was sent on 18 June 1936 to the Italian Embassies or Consulates in Paris, London, Washington, Cairo and Jerusalem in which the Italian Foreign Minister detailed the assistance to be given to the Falashas. (file no. 139, ASMAE). See also note 50 regarding the telegram sent following the Falashas' declaration of allegiance. Furthermore, on 25 June 1936, the Hebrew daily, *Ha-aretz*, published an interview with the Italian Consul General in Jerusalem in which the interviewee outlined the assistance granted to the Falashas by the Italians. Finally, Măngestu Sănbătu's declaration of allegiance to the fascist regime was also publicised widely.

<sup>64</sup> This issue will be discussed in chapter 7.

<sup>65</sup> Trevisan Semi claims that whilst the idea to resettle Jews in Ethiopia remained a possibility, Mussolini refrained from adopting anti-Falasha Laws. (E. Trevisan Semi, 'Fascist Colonialism and the Jews of Ethiopia,' *Pe'amim*, vol. 28, 1986, p.40). She further asserted that the severity of the antisemitic policies that were in existence in Europe allowed the Falashas to be left alone.

<sup>66</sup> *L'Informazione Diplomatica*, no.14, 16 February 1938.

European Jewry to the country.<sup>67</sup>

Thirdly, it would foster the loyalty of the Falashas towards the Italians which could be turned to the fascists' advantage, that is to restore order in the country and to help undermine Amhara domination. It is important to mention that despite the fascists proclamation of sovereignty over all of Ethiopia in May 1936, only one third of Ethiopia had in fact been occupied by the Italians at that time.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, to facilitate the conquest of Ethiopia, the Italians were concerned to foment internal discord and warfare and counted especially on the revolt of the non-Amhara populations against the Amhara resistance.<sup>69</sup>

For similar reasons, the Ethiopian Muslims were also seen to be given extra benefits by the Italians. Indeed, their religion and institutions were protected and for the first time they enjoyed freedom of worship and liberal financial support for their schools and mosques. Of all the peoples of Ethiopia, they perhaps benefited most from Italian rule.

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<sup>67</sup> On 15 July 1936, Captain Dordona, an Italian official, informed a representative of the Jewish Agency in Cairo that the object of this Jewish resettlement was on the one hand to help the Italians to consolidate their position in Ethiopia and on the other, to foster Jewish sympathy for Italy. (See Michaelis, *Mussolini*, p.88).

<sup>68</sup> See Bahru Zewde, *History of Modern Ethiopia*, p.163.

<sup>69</sup> Sbacchi, *Ethiopia*, p.157.

Although Italian policy was not always very clear, it consistently tended to be pro-Islamic. Again the policy of Italy towards the Muslims was of course influenced primarily by political-military interests as the Ethiopian Muslims constituted a precious reserve of men upon whom Italy could always count for support. Not only was Mussolini considered the protector of Islam by Ethiopian Muslims but his favourable treatment of them also had international repercussions since it made a good impression in the Middle East and in other Islamic countries.<sup>70</sup>

#### The Impact of the Occupation on the Falashas

Having examined the policies of the fascist regime towards the Falashas and the possible motivation behind them, I will now turn to the impact that the occupation, together with these policies, had on the Falashas.

Firstly, although the condition of the Falasha school in Addis Ababa did deteriorate and many pupils departed following the Italian invasion due to a lack of resources and funds, this can not be seen as a direct result of the occupation. There was already, in fact, a severe lack of funds before the Italians arrived due to the problems of fundraising abroad by pro-Falasha organisations.<sup>71</sup> Only a

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp. 161-165.

<sup>71</sup> It is evident from various reports that the donations to the school were already decreasing, prior to the occupation of Ethiopia, due to the precarious situation at the time of the European Jews. Faitlovitch was in fact informed in 1933 that "the tragic situation of the Jews in

year prior to the invasion of Ethiopia, Faitlovitch wrote to the American Pro-Falasha Committee to inform them that his programme for the Falashas was on the verge of complete collapse. He threatened that if the necessary funds did not arrive soon he would "be compelled to close and liquidate the school entirely."<sup>72</sup>

On the other hand, claims made by Faitlovitch and others that the Falashas suffered greatly under the fascists<sup>73</sup> would appear to be partly substantiated by the massacre of 120 Ethiopians in Märäba in 1937, which included tens of Falashas.<sup>74</sup> However, the majority of my interviewees informed me that the reason for the massacre of 33 Falashas was not due to the fact that they were Jewish but that the village in which they were living had given shelter to the

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Germany and the crisis which materialised ... has added another factor to make it difficult for us to secure money. Naturally thousands of American Jews feel that they must send relief now to these victims of terrible hate and persecution. When an appeal for funds is made now, 9 out of 10 answer "I must take care of the Jews in Germany first." (Temple Israel of the City of New York to Faitlovitch, 27 April 1933, FC no.100).

<sup>72</sup> Faitlovitch to the Pro-Falasha Committee, 19 August 1934, file no.433, AJDC. Viterbo also reported that from 1934, the school was in a grave crisis due to a lack of funds (see Viterbo, 'Relazione,' p.50). Finally, Tamrat Imanuél, in his letters to Faitlovitch, gives a similar report. (FC no.137).

<sup>73</sup> Faitlovitch to Reit, 9 May 1939, FC no.127. Faitlovitch claimed that as a result of anti-Jewish propaganda in Ethiopia, the Falashas were treated no better than their co-religionists elsewhere. This issue will be discussed in chapter 7.

<sup>74</sup> See I. Grinfeld, 'The Italian Invasion of Ethiopia and the Falashas: The Ethiopian Jews' Participation in the War' *Masuah*, vol.19, p.120.

rebel, Däjach Webnäh.<sup>75</sup> They were thus punished together with other Ethiopians for the crime of harbouring a wanted patriot. The killings, I was informed, were indiscriminate as the religious and tribal allegiance was irrelevant to the killers.<sup>76</sup>

My informants were also keen to stress the point that apart from this incident in Märäba, there were no other occasions when the Falashas were persecuted.<sup>77</sup> On the contrary, most believed that the period of the Italian occupation was overall beneficial for the Falashas, as well as for Ethiopia as a country,<sup>78</sup> and they were better off under the Italians than under Haile Sellassie.<sup>79</sup>

Indeed, after the initial shock of the invasion and having adjusted to these white foreigners and the advanced

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<sup>75</sup> Interviews with Abba Mäshäsha, 1 May 1995 and Ayyalu Abärä, 1 June 1995.

<sup>76</sup> Interviews with Qés Barku, 16 May 1995; Qés Yemanno, 4 April 1995; Bäqqälä Alämu, 29 June 1995. The village in which this massacre took place was inhabited by both Falashas and Christians.

<sup>77</sup> Interviews with Abba Mäshäsha, 1 May 1995; Qés Yemanno, 4 April 1995; Qés Tayyä, 20 March 1995. Several of my informants also heard rumours of attempts to gather Falashas in Gondar for the purpose of massacring them. It would appear though that these reports were completely unfounded.

<sup>78</sup> Interviews with mother of Esther Germai, 14 February 1995; Abba Mäshäsha, 1 May 1995; Zälläqä Dämozé, 6 March 1995. Several of my interviewees discussed the development of Ethiopia under Italian rule during which time many roads and buildings were constructed.

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Bäqqälä Alämu, 29 June 1995.

technology which they brought with them,<sup>80</sup> many Falashas took advantage of the occupation. Firstly, they were able to learn new farming and blacksmithing techniques from their new rulers.<sup>81</sup> Secondly, many of my informants were also able to sell their farm produce for a higher price to the Italians. Chickens, eggs and milk, which previously were not marketable since most families were self-sufficient in these products, were purchased by the Italians for quite high prices.<sup>82</sup>

There was also apparently much more food available than previously as, according to my interviewees, the Italians provided for those who were loyal to them. Some even recalled the bread which they distributed.<sup>83</sup> Also, following the Falasha leaders' declaration of loyalty to the new Italian government, the district governor of Gondar provided food and other help for the poor Jews of that vicinity.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Several of my interviewees discussed the surprise of seeing airplanes for the first time. Some were so petrified that they went into hiding. (Interviews with mother of Esther Germai, 14 February 1995; Ayyalu Abärra, 1 June 1995).

<sup>81</sup> Interviews with Abba Mäshäsha, 1 May 1995; Zälläqä Dämozé, 6 March 1995; Bäqqälä Alämu, 29 June 1995.

<sup>82</sup> Interviews with Qés Barku, 16 March 1995; Ayyalu Abärra, 1 June 1995; mother of Esther Germai, 14 February 1995.

<sup>83</sup> Interviews with Ayyalu Abärra, 1 June 1995; Bäqqälä Alämu, 29 June 1995; Abba Mäshäsha, 1 May 1995.

<sup>84</sup> As reported in *Juedische Rundschau*, 28 August 1936, file no. 433, AJDC.

Furthermore, the Italians also appeared to have temporarily abolished the land restrictions which had in the past denied the Falashas the right to own 'rist' or inheritable land. The landlords' role was in fact replaced by the local Italian governor who subsequently cancelled the land tax, a previous source of considerable burden for non-landowners such as the Falashas.<sup>85</sup>

With regards to religious practice, I was informed that the fascists allowed the Falashas to carry out their religious practices without hindrance. On some occasions, they were even assisted by various Italian officials who, for example, gave oxen to the Priests on festivals for sacrificial purposes,<sup>86</sup> supplied Falasha soldiers, fighting for the Italians, with meat that suited their dietary requirements<sup>87</sup> and allowed Falashas who were employed by them to rest on the sabbath.<sup>88</sup>

I was in fact told that as long as the Falashas obeyed the rules of the Italians, they were generally left alone

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<sup>85</sup> Interviews with Qés Barku, 16 May 1995; Bäqqälä Alämu, 29 June 1995; Ayyalu Abärra, 1 June 1995.

<sup>86</sup> Interviews with Qés Tayyä, 20 March 1995; Qés Tsion Levi, 12 May 1986 (with Shoshanna Ben Dor, Institute for Contemporary Jewry); Qés Yemanno, 4 April 1995.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Bäqqälä Alämu, 29 June 1995 who initially fought with the Italians during the occupation. He explained that both the Falashas and the Muslims in the Italian army were given their food separately in accordance with their respective dietary requirements.

<sup>88</sup> Interviews with Abba Mäshäsha, 1 May 1995; Qés Tayyä, 20 March 1995.



throughout most of the occupation. There was even a cordial relationship reported between the Falashas and some of the Italian officials who were living near their villages.<sup>89</sup>

The establishment of the villages of Wezabär and Ambobär during the Italian occupation is generally believed to have resulted from Falashas' fleeing the fascist oppressors to settle in more defensible terrain in the hills east of Gondar.<sup>90</sup> However, most of my interviewees were of the opinion that these two villages were set up mainly for economic reasons and in particular, to escape from Christian landlords.<sup>91</sup> None the less, uncertainty concerning their future and that of Ethiopia under the Italians may also have been an underlying factor. It is also apparent that the Italians contributed indirectly to the establishment of Wezabär and Ambobär by the building of roads near Falasha villages such as Wälläqa which may have made some villagers feel too exposed.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Interviews with Qés Tayyā, 20 March 1995; Uva Akaller, 12 April 1995; Qés Yemanno, 4 April 1995. See also interview with Abba Yehyas, 1 July 1988 with Shoshana Ben Dor, transcript located at the Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Jerusalem.

<sup>90</sup> See Messing, *Story*, p. 66 and K. Kaufman Shelemay, *Music, Ritual and Falasha History*, (Michigan, 1989), p.5.

<sup>91</sup> Interviews with Ayyalu Abärra, 1 June 1995; Abba Mäshäsha, 1 May 1995. Also see interviews with Qés Yemanno (26 August 1988 with Shoshana Ben Dor, Institute for Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University of Jerusalem); Abba Gété (6 June 1988 with Shoshana Ben Dor).

<sup>92</sup> A number of my interviewees left their villages to avoid coming into contact with the Italians. Qés Barku and his family left Azuza for Ambobär as the Italians were living nearby and mixing freely with the Falashas. The

During the occupation, there were Falashas who collaborated with the Italian authorities.<sup>93</sup> Some of Faitlovitch's students who had been educated abroad were able to take advantage of this fact and were employed by the Italians as interpreters.<sup>94</sup> It was also not unusual for blacksmiths, the majority if not all of whom were Falashas and previously scorned by the Christians, to be employed by the Italians. Having received training and the raw materials, they produced tools and other equipment for the colonialists.<sup>95</sup> Those blacksmiths who were employed by the Italians had the added advantage of being allowed to live just outside the Italian compounds in order to be protected from patriots.<sup>96</sup>

Some Falashas were also enticed by the Italians to help

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elders of the village apparently declared that it was necessary to leave Azuza and find an area like a forest or desert to distance themselves from the white foreigners. Indeed, the area which was to become Ambobär was a forest and located far from the Italians. (Interview with Qés Barku, 16 May 1995). Qés Yemanno discussed a feeling of anxiety and uncertainty that was prevalent among some of the Falashas at the beginning of the occupation that may have caused some to leave their villages. (Interview, 4 April 1995).

<sup>93</sup> According to Bahru Zewde, "self-interest and self-preservation induced many Ethiopians" to collaborate with the Italians. (Bahru Zewde, *History of Modern Ethiopia*, p.174).

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Mängestu Yeshaq, 7 February 1995.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Abba Mäshäsha, 1 May 1995; Zälläqä Dämozé, 6 March 1995.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Abba Mäshäsha, 1 May 1995.

fight the resistance.<sup>97</sup> Many agreed to collaborate with the Italian authorities in this manner as they believed the Italians were beneficial for both Falashas and Ethiopia and that their rule was permanent. Some of my informants were swayed by the Italian propaganda which claimed that Haile Sellassie had not been listening to the people. They believed that the Italians were going to rectify the situation by a) listening to the voice of the people; b) easing life for the population; and c) re-structuring the country.<sup>98</sup> Others joined the Italian army in order to receive a weapon and to acquire the prestigious status of a soldier<sup>99</sup> with the benefits that accompanied it such as extra food.<sup>100</sup>

There were also Falashas involved in the resistance against

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<sup>97</sup> According to Bahru Zewde, "thanks to their knowledge and of the local conditions, the *banda* (the Italian word for 'band, group,' used to signify Ethiopian collaborators) played far greater havoc with the Resistance than the Italian troops effected." (Bahru Zewde, *History of Modern Ethiopia*, p.174).

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Zälläqä Damozé, 6 March 1995.

<sup>99</sup> Sbacchi asserted that the Ethiopians believed "the possession of a gun lent prestige and social distinction, and it was the pride of every man to be considered a warrior." (Sbacchi, *Ethiopia*, p.179).

<sup>100</sup> Qés Yemanno claimed that many young Falashas became enticed by the Italians to join the army by offering them a weapon. (Interview, 4 April 1995). Bäqqälä Alämu stated that there was no clear ideology behind his desire to join the Italian army. He gave his allegiance to the Italians as he was informed that everything was plentiful in Italy and that their soldiers were given food and clothes in abundance. (Interview, 29 June 1995).

the Italians.<sup>101</sup> These rebels came mainly from areas which were not under Italian rule and they thus had no choice but to fight with the patriots for fear of being regarded as disloyal by those in control of their region. When it appeared that the Italians were on the verge of defeat, some Falashas switched sides and began fighting with the patriots, using the same weapons that the Italians had given them. One of my informants who initially fought for the Italians told me that when he realised that they were getting weaker and losing control, he switched sides and fought with the patriots. He changed his allegiance in order not be considered a traitor by his countrymen.<sup>102</sup>

Therefore, it would appear that the Falashas were initially divided into two groups during the Italian occupation, those who ostensibly supported the Italians and those who supported the resistance movement. I was informed that the people, in the majority of cases, were initially divided into the groups according to which area they lived in and not according to differing ideology.<sup>103</sup> In other words, in

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<sup>101</sup> For an analysis of the Falashas in the resistance movement see I. Grinfeld, 'The Italian Invasion of Ethiopia,' p.120. For an analysis of the resistance movement, in general, see Bahru Zewde, *History of Modern Ethiopia*, pp.166-176.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Zälläqä Dämozé, 6 April 1995. In this interview he claimed that he initially fought for the Italians as no-one believed they would lose control, since the Italian army had planes and bombs and the resistance movement were on foot. It would appear that for a short period, Ato Zälläqä simultaneously fought for both sides.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Qés Barku, 16 March 1995.

areas where the Italians were in control, most of the Falashas supported the fascists and in areas not conquered by the Italians, the opposite was true. One of my interviewees insisted that the Falashas had no choice but to appear loyal to those in control of their region for fear of being considered traitors by the local leaders, be they Italian or Ethiopian.<sup>104</sup> It was a very difficult and complicated situation which apparently divided the Falashas physically but did not create an internal conflict. The occasion did not arise of Falashas fighting other Falashas.<sup>105</sup>

Finally, towards the end of the occupation, it was reported that the Italians, sensing defeat, became more aggressive towards their subjects. For example, they demanded every Ethiopian family, including the Falashas, to give up one son for the war effort. Although, this policy was never fully implemented, the final year of fascist rule did cause some concern among many Falashas. None the less, my informants also admitted that the reprisal attacks were not specifically directed against the Falashas.<sup>106</sup>

Therefore, in light of this oral testimony of various senior members of the Falasha community, the impression

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Interviews with Zälläqä Dämozé, 6 April 1995; Ayyalu Abärä, 1 June 1995.

that I gained from the written documentation is confirmed, namely, that in fact there was no specific campaign launched against the Falashas by the fascists. On the contrary, for the majority of the occupation they were able to live their lives relatively unmolested. It is thus my opinion that the Italian occupation of Ethiopia had no dramatic impact on the lives of the Falashas, as most of the literature written on the subject would have it.

What is more, after the Italians had departed Ethiopia and Haile Sellassie had returned, life for the Falashas slowly reverted to more or less how it had been prior to the occupation. Any benefits which they may have experienced under the Italians were no longer felt<sup>107</sup> and remnants from the occupation such as roads<sup>108</sup> and other technological improvements did not have any immediate effect on the Falashas. Finally, the educational programme and contacts with world Jewry which were temporarily suspended were, as we will see, slowly resumed with the return of Faitlovitch to Ethiopia in 1942. In fact, Faitlovitch was given assistance and encouragement by Haile Sellassie in his endeavour to re-commence his educational work among the Falashas as part of the Emperor's plan to advance his

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<sup>107</sup> One of the first measures implemented by Haile Sellassie on his return to Ethiopia was to put a tax on all lands. (See Askale Negash, *Haile Selassie*, (New York, 1989), p.77.

<sup>108</sup> However, as we will see in the next chapter, Jewish Agency officials were able to utilise the improved road network to carry out their plans for the Falashas.

people and improve the conditions of the country.

I will conclude this section by observing that the legacy of the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, as far as the Falashas were concerned, appears to have been an increase in their official recognition as Jews by world Jewry. It would seem that various pro-Falasha organisations and individuals attempted to place the Falashas in the arena of world Jewry by exaggerating the impact that the occupation had on them. In this way, they could be portrayed as 'suffering Jews' at the same time that European Jewry was being severely persecuted.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE CAMPAIGN FOR CHANGE

You must remember that Ethiopia is like Sleeping Beauty, that time has stood still here for 2000 years. We must take great care, therefore, not to overwhelm her with changes now that she is beginning to awaken from her long sleep.<sup>1</sup>

Haile Sellassie returned to Ethiopia in 1941<sup>2</sup> to find that many parts of his country had undergone a significant transformation. Fascist Italy had embarked upon an extensive campaign to develop its new African empire and had invested millions of dollars to create a basic infrastructure.<sup>3</sup> Road building was perhaps the major achievement of the Italians and this had, for the first time in Ethiopian history, brought large areas into

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<sup>1</sup> Haile Sellassie as quoted by Henry de Monfreid, *Vers les terres hostiles de l'Ethiopie*, 1933, pp. 229-30 in R.L. Hess, *Ethiopia - The Modernisation of Autocracy*, (New York, 1970), p.106.

<sup>2</sup> On Haile Sellassie's return, he was accompanied by Orde Wingate, Avraham 'Aqavia, one of Wingate's Jewish disciples and the 'Gideon Force,' a mainly Jewish, Palestinian army unit. Wingate proclaimed to the troops that "the war to liberate Ethiopia is a war for all the oppressed people, it is a war for the liberation of the Jews. Anyone who is a friend of Ethiopia is automatically a friend of the Jews ... In your work here and in Ethiopia you can help me, and if I succeed there I can better help Zionism. So it is for Zionism that you fight in Ethiopia." (A. Aqavia, *With Wingate in Abyssinia*, (Tel Aviv, 1944) as cited in H. Erlich, *Ethiopia and the Middle East*, (London, 1994), p.168). During their stay in the country, relations between Palestine and Ethiopia were slowly established, (see *ibid*, pp.167-8) a relationship which would, as we will see, ultimately affect the Falashas.

<sup>3</sup> Hess, *Ethiopia*, p. 68. See also Bahru Zewde, *History of Modern Ethiopia*, pp.163-5.



comparatively close contact with the capital.<sup>4</sup> The Italian occupation was also characterised by some degree of urbanisation, though this was more or less restricted to Addis Ababa, Gondar, Jimma and Harrar.<sup>5</sup> In five years, claims Del Boca, 25 hospitals, 14 hotels, dozens of post offices, telephone exchanges, aqueducts, schools and shops had been built.<sup>6</sup> This modernisation of the country by the Italians was looked upon favourably by many Ethiopians. For example, Haile Mariam Gemesu who was adviser to Abebe Aragi, the Addis Ababa Chief of Police, stated that in spite of the fact that he had fought the Duke of Aosta and General Nasi, the Italians had brought much well-being to Ethiopia.<sup>7</sup> Several of my informants in fact expressed disappointment that the Italians had only occupied Ethiopia for five years since they realised how much had been accomplished by the fascists in such a short period of

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<sup>4</sup> Pankhurst, 'Economic Verdict,' p.74. According to Del Boca, the Italians had in five years "endowed Ethiopia with over 5000 kilometres of new roads, some asphalted, some flattened with steamrollers, overcoming difficulties that seemed insurmountable." (Del Boca, *Ethiopian War*, p.232). Sbacchi considered the building of roads to be "the most visible achievement of the Italian presence." (Sbacchi, *Ethiopia*, p.199). Cf. *Ethiopian Review*, volume 1, (3), October 1944 and Bahru Zewde, *History of Modern Ethiopia*, p.164.

<sup>5</sup> Bahru Zewde, *History of Modern Ethiopia*, p.163. To a lesser extent a few other towns were also developed due to their position on the road network.

<sup>6</sup> Del Boca, *Ethiopian War*, p.233.

<sup>7</sup> Sbacchi, *Ethiopia*, p.224.

time.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, "unlike Haile Sellassie, who had always been hampered by regional resistance and limited funds during his eighteen years as regent and emperor, the Italians, who poured virtually unlimited funds into a country where they maintained a large army, were able to accomplish much in the way of material modernisation."<sup>9</sup>

It has been claimed that "the energetic construction" carried out during the Italian occupation "proved an enormous contribution to the Ethiopian government that succeeded them."<sup>9</sup> What is more, the Italian intervention in Ethiopia also seems to have "led to the centralization of the ruling power and the elimination of the feudal system of the rases, the system Haile Sellassie had vainly strived for years to bring to an end."<sup>10</sup> It is therefore not surprising to discover that the emperor was in no hurry to expel the Italians on his return to Ethiopia.<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, the Italians in Ethiopia were accepted, even popular, in the post war years, a relationship which

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<sup>8</sup> Interviews with Bäqqälä Alämu, 29 June 1995; the Mother of Esther Germai, 14 February 1995; Zälläqä Dämozé, 6 March 1995; Abba Mäshäsha, 1 May 1995.

<sup>9</sup> Hess, *Ethiopia*, p.68.

<sup>9</sup> F.J. Simoons, *Northwest Ethiopia, Peoples and Economy*, (Madison, 1960), p.18.

<sup>10</sup> Del Boca, *Ethiopian War*, p.238. See also Teshale Tibebu, *Making*, p.107.

<sup>11</sup> Although on re-entering Addis Ababa, on 5 May 1941, Haile Sellassie declared publicly that all Italians had to be expelled from Ethiopia, he admitted that their presence was desired. (Sbacchi, *Ethiopia*, pp. 215-217).

Sbacchi has described as "an irony of history."<sup>12</sup>

However, Haile Sellassie also discovered in 1941 that there was a "most horrifying shortage ... in trained and educated personnel."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, many of the Ethiopians who had obtained an education abroad prior to the Italian occupation had been systematically annihilated by the fascists.<sup>14</sup> This occurred following Mussolini's decision to kill off young Ethiopian intellectuals on the assumption that without them the country would be more easily governed. The worst excesses occurred in February 1937 after an attempt on General Rodolfo Graziani's life.<sup>15</sup>

Haile Sellassie realised that if his policies of

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.224. Although the Italians were the enemy and expected to suffer from the Ethiopian reaction with the return of Haile Sellassie, they did in fact enjoy his clemency and protection. It surprised the British authorities that Italians and Ethiopians, far from hating each other, were getting on well together. (p.215).

<sup>13</sup> J.H. Spencer, *Ethiopia at Bay - A Personal Account of the Haile Sellassie Years*, (Michigan, 1984), p.112.

<sup>14</sup> See for example L. Mosley, *Haile Selassie, The Conquering Lion*, (London and New York, 1964), p.245. Cf. C. Clapham, *Haile-Selassie's Government*, (London and Harlow, 1969), pp.19-20 who claims that "reports of wholesale massacre of the educated are greatly exaggerated." It appears that the massacres were sporadic but violent.

<sup>15</sup> C. Sandford, *The Lion of Judah Hath Prevailed - being the biography of His Imperial Majesty Haile Sellassie I*, (London, 1955), pp. 130-133. "This elimination of the intelligentsia was to create what is often called 'the missing generation' in Ethiopia's intellectual and political history between the pre-war and the post-war generations." (Bahru Zewde, *History of Modern Ethiopia*, pp.170-1).

modernisation and centralisation of power<sup>16</sup> were to be adopted then he would need the total support of this now diminished section of Ethiopian society.<sup>17</sup> He therefore attempted to utilise all remnants of this valuable part of the population by employing them in government service.<sup>18</sup> Thus as far as educated Falashas were concerned, Haile Sellassie was "only too happy to employ them ... in the newly established ministries in Addis Ababa"<sup>19</sup> where several attained a high position. Additionally, in an attempt to exploit every possible line of assistance in the fields of education and public health, foreign missions were, with some reluctance, permitted to resume their activities but under strict guidelines.<sup>20</sup> The Church's Mission Among the Jews (CMJ) and Jacques Faitlovitch's Pro-Falasha Committee were two such organisations allowed to recommence their respective programmes. The authorization granted to these two societies initiated a new campaign in

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<sup>16</sup> See Bahru Zewde, *History of Modern Ethiopia*, p.201.

<sup>17</sup> See S.D. Messing, 'Changing Ethiopia,' *Middle East Journal*, August 1955, pp. 413-432.

<sup>18</sup> From 1941, Haile Sellassie aimed persistently at drawing the educated near him to develop a kind of father-son relationship. He stressed the importance of education in Ethiopia's development to such an extent that it appeared to be a magic formula for change. (Randi R. Balsvik, *Haile Sellassie's Students: The Intellectual and Social Background to Revolution, 1952-1977*, (Michigan, 1985), p.4). See Marcus, *History of Ethiopia*, p.160, who claimed that "Haile Sellassie believed that the effects of education would transform his feudal empire into a modern state."

<sup>19</sup> S.D. Messing, 'Journey to the Falashas: Ethiopia's Black Jews,' *Commentary*, July 1956, p.29.

<sup>20</sup> See Spencer, *Ethiopia*, pp. 170-71.

the battle for recruits from amongst the Falashas.

### The Return of the Missionaries

With the return of Haile Sellassie to Ethiopia, the CMJ was anxious to resume its work in the country. On 29 February 1948, Reverend Eric Payne was demobilised from the British Army, where he had been serving as Army Chaplain for the British Military Mission in Ethiopia. According to Payne, he felt called by God to re-start the mission "to revive the Ethiopian Orthodox Church by bringing in live converts ... through the Falashas."<sup>21</sup>

He subsequently discovered that Jenda, the former missionary base, was in ruins and was also quite a distance from the road to Lake Tsana, built by the Italians.<sup>22</sup> What is more, "the former converts were dead spiritually"<sup>23</sup> and seemed not to be keen for the Mission to return to Djenda except for material reasons."<sup>24</sup> Therefore, he decided to choose a different site for the headquarters of the

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Payne, 10 March 1994. It should be recalled that the CMJ's ultimate objective in Ethiopia was to revive the Ethiopian Church. The conversion of Falashas into the Coptic Church was seen as a means of realising this aim. It is evident that the mission also intended to use the Kemants for this purpose. (See *JMI*, August 1947, pp.6-7).

<sup>22</sup> Church's Ministry Among the Jews, 'The Story of the Mission since 1943,' CMJ Archives, Bodleian Library.

<sup>23</sup> Payne asserted that the majority of Falasha converts had become members of the Coptic Church.

<sup>24</sup> CMJ, 'Story of the Mission since 1943,' CMJ Archives, Bodleian Library.

Mission. He decided it should be located in an area where the Falashas were unbaptised and they could start their work afresh.<sup>25</sup> The location selected was a former Italian farm, fifty miles north of Gondar on the road to Asmara.<sup>26</sup>

One of the first and, indeed, most important converts gained by the re-established Mission was Qés Asras, a former priest of the village of Birra. He was also a former student of Faitlovitch and had been selected, along with three others, to study in Europe.<sup>27</sup> His conversion, together with his family, which took place on 20 April 1952, apparently caused quite a stir among the Falashas. Within three months, two of his friends arrived at the mission's compound and later, three others.<sup>28</sup> In a short period of time, there were enough potential converts to form a small Bible School for the Falashas. In 1955, Payne decided to convert the Bible school into a residential

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<sup>25</sup> According to the missionary journals of 1947, the Falashas "present[ed] obvious contrasts from the westernised, cultured or politically conscious Jews with whom the agents of the Society [were] in contact elsewhere. They [were] beyond the range of Zionist propaganda; the hot flame of Jewish nationalism [had] cast no glow upon their horizon; and they [were] mercifully free from the poisonous environment of antisemitism." (JMI, August 1947, p.5).

<sup>26</sup> The farm was located at 'Shimelako,' 2 kilometres north of Dabat. (AR, 1948-49, p.25).

<sup>27</sup> However, his parents refused to consent to his request to study abroad and instead sent him to study with Falasha monks for two years. Subsequently, he studied with Däbtära Barok for another two years.

<sup>28</sup> From 1952 to 1957, Qés Asras fulfilled the role of 'native agent' for the Falashas.

Families' school with husbands and wives learning together.<sup>29</sup> In addition, a clinic was established at the missionary compound where free medical care was offered to all Ethiopians. It also provided an opportunity for the missionaries to preach to the patients.<sup>30</sup> These ideas arose partly as a result of a restriction imposed upon the missionaries by the Ethiopian government which forbade them from preaching outside the compound.<sup>31</sup> The missionaries had therefore to encourage the Falashas to come to them.

Payne soon realised that the evangelisation of the Falashas by trained 'native missionaries' would prove to be a very difficult task. The students at the mission's schools were mostly illiterate and therefore tuition had to begin with the Alphabet. Moreover, "most [had] little idea of what the Bible [was] to begin with; they merely [wanted]

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<sup>29</sup> Payne, *Ethiopian Jews*, p.88.

<sup>30</sup> The missionaries believed that "in such a region and among a people who are still comparatively primitive, the value of medical aid needs no emphasising" (AR, 1948, p.5) as to its importance in attracting potential converts. As will be recalled, this was a similar tactic used by Faitlovitch.

<sup>31</sup> In Decree no.3 of Negarit Gazeta: Regulations on establishment of missions of 1944 by Tshafe Tezaz Wedde Gioguis, it states that (1) Missionary work was to be restricted to non-Christians only. (2) In the Ethiopian Church area there was to be no proselytising (although establishment of hospitals or non-denominational schools was permitted). (3) In mission schools, Ethiopian Orthodox Church teachers may be required for some hours. (Located in CMJ Archives, Bodleian Library). It would appear that the implementation of this policy was influenced by Yona Boggalä, who held an important position in the Ethiopian Ministry of Education. (CMJ, 'The Story of the Mission since 1943,' p.7).

teaching."<sup>32</sup> None the less, he still endeavoured "to form a fellowship" within the Ethiopian Church "as soon as there [were] a sufficient number of converts with real spiritual life."<sup>33</sup>

However, the CMJ's difficulties did not end there. Apart from the restrictions imposed upon the missionaries and their inability to venture out and select suitable potential converts, there was also competition from other missionary organisations.<sup>34</sup> The Seventh Day Adventist Mission and Jehovah's Witnesses were also seeking to convert the Falashas. Occasionally, the competition for converts resulted in foul play. For example, in 1954, the Seventh Day Adventist Mission allegedly "stole" several children from the CMJ's compound by promising them better food and clothes and in 1956, the Jehovah's Witnesses used a similar tactic.<sup>35</sup> Finally, and more importantly, Payne considered the Jewish counter mission to be "a much more serious challenge" to their work.<sup>36</sup> The CMJ conjectured that with the resumption of this campaign, "a revival of

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<sup>32</sup> CMJ, 'The Story of a Mission since 1947,' p.9.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Competition in missionary work from other organisation was described in missionary journals as 'work of the devil.' (See for example, AR, 1951-54, p.524).

<sup>35</sup> They apparently offered double the salary to CMJ's students if they would join them. (CMJ, 'The Story of the Mission since 1943,' p.9). See also Payne, *Ethiopian Jews*, p.87.

<sup>36</sup> Payne, *Ethiopian Jews*, p.87.



Jewish faith and practice" would occur among the Falashas"<sup>37</sup> as the Jewish mission was allegedly better financed and equipped than the CMJ.

As a result of the above difficulties, the CMJ's mission among the Falashas in the 1940's and 50's was not very productive.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, the Jewish counter mission, resumed by Faitlovitch and continued by the Israelis, had far greater success in realising their objectives.

#### The Return of Jacques Faitlovitch

Following the liberation of Ethiopia, Faitlovitch and his supporters believed that his personal friendship with Haile Sellassie was such that his return to the country "would be not only viewed with favour by the Ethiopian government, but would indeed be welcomed by them as a distinct contribution to the campaign of educational advancement of Ethiopia and to the restoration of normal life in Abyssinia."<sup>39</sup> Therefore, Faitlovitch realised that he would

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<sup>37</sup> AR, 1951-54, p.177.

<sup>38</sup> The only figures I could find for the number of conversions that occurred among the Falashas during this period (and beyond) indicate that only 78 men, 67 women and 145 children had been baptised up until 1968. (I. Lewis to Imperial Ethiopian Government, Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, 4 July 1968, CMJ Archives, Bodleian Library).

<sup>39</sup> Y. Ben Zvi to J.S. Macpherson, Chief Secretary of Government of Palestine, 28 July 1941, BZ no.6/1/1/3.

only be allowed to return to Ethiopia<sup>40</sup> if he was to offer his services to assist the emperor in any way possible.<sup>41</sup> He was eventually granted permission to return to Ethiopia in 1942 and subsequently offered the position of Inspector General at the Ministry of Education.<sup>42</sup>

Faitlovitch and his supporters asserted that the Falashas had suffered greatly under the Italian occupation<sup>43</sup> since the fascists had "frustrat[ed] Jewish activities, paralysed Falasha life [and] ruined many communities."<sup>44</sup> It was further claimed that the Falashas had been subjected to the

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<sup>40</sup> The difficulty in returning to Ethiopia did not necessarily stem from Haile Sellassie but from the British authorities who were restricting entrance into the country.

<sup>41</sup> On 20 August 1940, 3 December 1940 and 5 September 1941, Faitlovitch wrote to Haile Sellassie, offering his services to Ethiopia "in any way possible."

<sup>42</sup> Faitlovitch to the Ethiopian Minister of Education, 2 December 1942, FC no. 124. He was not to take up this position and was, instead, appointed advisor to the Ethiopian Embassy in Cairo, where he remained from June 1944 until October 1946. According to Ben Ze'ev, he took up this position in the hope that the honour of the Falashas would consequently increase in the eyes of other Ethiopians. (Faitlovitch, *Journey*, p.19).

<sup>43</sup> Ben Zvi to Haile Sellassie, 31 December 1941, BZ no. 6/1/1/3. This theme had already been discussed in 1939 when Faitlovitch asserted that "we cannot expect that Jewish subjects in Abyssinia should be treated by their present rulers better than the Jews in Italy ... the Italians ... spread also in Abyssinia anti-Jewish propaganda, distributing papers in the native language, enlightening the Abyssinians by explaining to them that all evil is coming from the Yahuds and that the Falashas consequently are not better to be treated than their co-religionists elsewhere." (Faitlovitch to Reit, 9 May 1939, pp. 2-3, FC no.127).

<sup>44</sup> Faitlovitch to Bato, Jewish Board of Deputies, South Africa, 9 October 1942, FC no.100.

same persecution as the Jews of the Axis countries for they also "underwent a time of humiliation and suffering," a propaganda campaign had been launched against them throughout the country and "the existence of the Abyssinian Jews [was] in imminent danger of disappearance."<sup>45</sup> Faitlovitch declared that "never in their history have they had to pass through such ... anguish[ed] spiritual distress"<sup>46</sup> which had caused many Falashas to become 'demoralised' during the Italian occupation.<sup>47</sup>

Following the liberation of Ethiopia, Faitlovitch and his

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<sup>45</sup> Faitlovitch to Goodman, Director of Jewish Section, Religions Division, British Ministry of Information, 23 April 1943, BZ no.6/1/1/4. As I illustrated in the previous chapter, the commonly accepted notion that fascist antisemitic persecution was directed towards the Falashas during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia is vastly exaggerated. This misconception should be placed in the context of Pro-Falasha propaganda, instigated by Faitlovitch (as we saw in chapter 3), which attempted to draw comparisons between the Falashas' history and world Jewry's experience. In this case, the common themes which were exploited were antisemitism, persecution and suffering. (Also see Kaplan, 'Invention of Ethiopian Jews,' p.651).

<sup>46</sup> Faitlovitch to Solomon, 19 November 1945, FC no.117.

<sup>47</sup> Faitlovitch to Kramer, 26 February 1950, FC no.142. According to Edward Ullendorff, he had advised Faitlovitch against returning to the Falashas following the liberation of Ethiopia. He claimed the Falashas' experience under fascist rule had shown them that there were apt to be grave disadvantages connected with Jewishness. Since Jewish consciousness had only been stimulated by Faitlovitch in the course of his visits to Ethiopia early this century, Ullendorff anticipated a negative reception towards Faitlovitch whom, he asserted, had unwittingly placed the Falashas in such a perilous situation. Ullendorff, in fact, claims that Faitlovitch subsequently needed to be rescued from the Falashas, an account which appears to be completely unfounded since, as we have seen, there was no specific persecution levelled against the Falashas during the fascist occupation. (E. Ullendorff, *The Two Zions*, (Oxford, 1988), pp.151-2).

supporters further suggested that the Falashas continued to be in a rather precarious position. Although it was assumed that they were in the same economic situation as other Ethiopians and that there was no persecution levelled against them,<sup>48</sup> there were other problems that were prevalent amongst the Falashas which allegedly placed them in imminent danger<sup>49</sup>:-

- 1) In Haile Sellassie's attempt to unite the country and culturally unify the various and heterogenous peoples of the Ethiopian empire,<sup>50</sup> the "spiritual Jewish survival"<sup>51</sup> of the Falashas was allegedly

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<sup>48</sup> Tamrat Imanuél to Dr. Schwarzbart, World Jewish Congress, 13 September 1949, FC no.137. Tamrat, in fact, stated that "la constitution du pays dictée par l'Empereur actuel accorde et ordonne les mêmes droits et devoirs à tous les sujets sans aucune distinction de race et de religion." He also felt obliged to "souligner l'attitude bienveillante envers les Falashas de S.M. Haila-Selasse [sic] 1er, attitude s'inspirant de sentiments profondément humanitaires, protectrice de travailleur, généreuse et toujours noble."

<sup>49</sup> Faitlovitch to Sauter, 10 December 1946, FC no.117.

<sup>50</sup> One of the methods adopted was the 'Amharisation' of Ethiopia, the promotion of Amharic language and Amhara culture over other languages and culture patterns. This plan was linked to the 'modernisation' programme of Ethiopia undertaken by Haile Sellassie. (Hess, *Ethiopia*, p.156).

<sup>51</sup> This rather vague term was commonly used by Faitlovitch in his correspondence and articles. In chapter 3, I described how his plan for the Falashas' "spiritual survival and regeneration" was linked to world Jewry and traditional Jewish education. He did not consider the Falashas' own religion and culture sufficient for their 'preservation' and thus intended to impose a foreign way of life upon them which he believed would meet this objective.

placed in danger.<sup>52</sup>

2) The missionaries were quick to resume their work following the liberation of Ethiopia, by opening clinics and schools. As they were seen to be assisting the emperor with his educational programme, the missionaries were, according to Faitlovitch, "gradually becoming the favorites of the government ... on matters concerning the education of the people." This activity was also "not of advantage to the spiritual regeneration of the Falashas."<sup>53</sup>

3) The general conditions of the country were deemed detrimental to the Falashas' intellectual revival. Without assistance from Western Jewry, Faitlovitch feared for the spiritual survival of the Falashas.<sup>54</sup>

4) Following the Italian occupation, the Falashas were in a state of depression and despair due to their feeling of abandonment by world Jewry. Moreover, their spiritual and religious condition had deteriorated as a result of a lack of Jewish education following the cessation of educational activities.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Faitlovitch to Solomon, 19 November 1945, FC no.117.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> A. Rosenfeld, Brit Ha'Ivrit Ha'Olamit to Rabbi Ze'ev Gold, Head of the department for Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora, 21 November 1951, FC no.127. This

5) On his return to Ethiopia with his wife towards the end of 1942, Faitlovitch was disappointed that his "ex-pupils and potential school masters of any quality [had] been drawn into the new bureaucracy,"<sup>56</sup> including his most devoted pupils.<sup>57</sup> He initially believed that he could no longer rely on his students for assistance in his programme as they had "disqualified themselves from religious leadership by an insidious assimilation which public office tends to encourage."<sup>58</sup>

6) On Haile Sellassie's return to Ethiopia, he resumed the taxation system which had been cancelled under the Italians.<sup>59</sup> According to Faitlovitch,<sup>60</sup> and confirmed by my informants,<sup>61</sup> this created a depression in the

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self-centered and patronising view of the Falashas' religious life was typical of Faitlovitch.

<sup>56</sup> Statement from Faitlovitch, October 1942, FC no.93.

<sup>57</sup> Faitlovitch to Solomon, Treasurer of the American Pro-Falasha Committee, 19 November 1945, FC no.117. He claimed that the high salaries paid by the government had attracted the young educated Falashas to their new positions.

<sup>58</sup> Faitlovitch to C. Kramer, 26 February 1950, FC no.142.

<sup>59</sup> For a detailed analysis of Ethiopia's taxation system following the liberation of Ethiopia see P. Schwab, *Decision Making in Ethiopia: A Study of the Political Process*, (London, 1972). See also Bahru Zewde, *History of Modern Ethiopia*, pp.192-4.

<sup>60</sup> Faitlovitch to Solomon, 19 November 1945, p.3, FC no. 117.

<sup>61</sup> Interviews with Bäqqälä Alämu, 29 June 1995; Mother of Esther Germai, 14 February 1995.

Falashas' economic and social situation.

Suggestions Proposed to Resolve the Falashas' Alleged  
Predicament From 1941 Until 1948.

a) Education

Although the situation in Ethiopia and among the Falashas had changed during and following the Italian occupation, Faitlovitch and his supporters still believed education to be the main method by which the Falashas' presumed difficulties might be resolved. Faitlovitch conjectured that as Haile Sellassie was encouraging "the uplifting and progress of the country," he would also view with favour "the intellectual regeneration of the Abyssinian Jewish population."<sup>62</sup> He therefore assumed that the emperor would assist him in his endeavour to re-commence the educational programme for the Falashas.<sup>63</sup>

Faitlovitch's intention, with its somewhat paradoxical note, that he had proposed before the Italian occupation was again discussed: namely, to "regenerate" the Falashas

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<sup>62</sup> Faitlovitch to Goodman, 23 April 1943, FC no.132.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. Indeed, one of the primary concerns of Haile Sellassie, following his return, was to re-establish the country's educational system which the Italians had so deliberately destroyed. (Spencer, *Ethiopia at Bay*, p.112). Haile Sellassie consistently identified himself as "the father and upholder of modern education." (Balsvik, *Haile Sellassie's Students*, p.4). Since the emperor believed education to be another solution to the central problem of modernising and strengthening the State (see Hess, *Ethiopia*, p.156), he was eager to develop this system any way possible, even if that meant importing foreigners who might follow their own agenda.

intellectually, culturally and religiously so that they could be "preserved."<sup>64</sup> Once they had risen to a "higher level of Jewish and general culture," the Falashas, he declared, would "be intellectually in [a] position to maintain, defend and transplant conscientiously their identity."<sup>65</sup> Education was thus deemed essential, especially for the youth, in order "to save [the Falashas] from extinction and to invigorate their Jewish existence."<sup>66</sup>

Faitlovitch now believed that it was imperative to expand the educational programme to reach all the districts inhabited by the Falashas.<sup>67</sup> Not only did he intend to re-organise the school in Addis Ababa but he was also determined to establish three other schools in the interior. The purpose of these schools was to provide training for the youth "in their own surroundings, in a centre of Falasha communities." This would, it was hoped; a) ensure "their spiritual conservation" by preventing alienation from their traditional life;<sup>68</sup> b) allow them to remain in contact with their families; and c) reduce the

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<sup>64</sup> See chapter 3 for an analysis of this paradox.

<sup>65</sup> Faitlovitch to Goodman, 23 April 1943, FC no.132.

<sup>66</sup> Faitlovitch to Solomon, 19 November 1945, FC no.117.

<sup>67</sup> Faitlovitch to Goodman, 23 April 1943, FC no.132.

<sup>68</sup> Note, once again, the contradiction in Faitlovitch's aims whereby he intended to prevent alienation from their traditional life yet was intent of changing many aspects of their way of life.



expense of the educational programme.<sup>69</sup>

Besides religious and general secular education, Faitlovitch also maintained that some modern professional training in arts and crafts would also have to be given to the Falasha youth.<sup>70</sup> The most appropriate place for the proposed professional training centre was considered to be the grounds of the school compound in Addis Ababa. Faitlovitch further speculated that in time some revenue might be obtained by selling the objects manufactured at the institute.<sup>71</sup>

#### b) Medical Facilities

In his desire to resume the pro-Falasha programme fully, Faitlovitch again advocated the need to introduce among the Falashas "a modern system of hygiene and sanitation."<sup>72</sup> This, in his opinion, would involve the establishment of medical clinics in several large Falasha settlements to be managed by American Jewish doctors.<sup>73</sup> Faitlovitch hoped these clinics would "make a most valuable contribution to

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<sup>69</sup> Faitlovitch to Solomon, 19 November 1945, FC no.117. It seems likely that Faitlovitch reached this decision after consulting Viterbo's recommendations. (See Viterbo, 'Relazione,' pp. 88-89).

<sup>70</sup> This plan derived from the prevailing economic conditions which placed the Falashas in an unpromising situation.

<sup>71</sup> Faitlovitch to Solomon, 19 November 1945, FC no.117.

<sup>72</sup> Faitlovitch to Goodman, 23 April 1943, FC no.132.

<sup>73</sup> See footnote no.87.

the cause of the Falasha regeneration"<sup>74</sup> and "aid .... [their] salvation."<sup>75</sup> By this, he was clearly alluding to the re-commencement of a counter-missionary campaign. Furthermore, he intended once again that the medical facilities should serve an additional purpose, namely, to gain favour in the eyes of the local and central authorities of the country by also assisting the "non-Jewish inhabitants" of the country.<sup>76</sup> Finally, he clearly expected his medical support to "attract large sympathies from many philanthropic and charitable societies"<sup>77</sup> which would undoubtedly serve a purpose in his pro-Falasha campaign.

c) The Resettlement of European Jewish Refugees in Ethiopia.<sup>78</sup>

Faitlovitch now firmly believed in using Ethiopia as "a shelter place for a selected number of Jewish refugees from

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<sup>74</sup> Faitlovitch to Solomon, 19 November 1945, p.4, FC no.117.

<sup>75</sup> Faitlovitch to Goodman, 23 April 1943, FC no.132.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. and Faitlovitch to Solomon, 19 November 1945, FC no.117.

<sup>77</sup> Faitlovitch to Solomon, 19 November 1945, p.4, FC no.117.

<sup>78</sup> For more information on this subject see S.I. Minerbi, 'Il progetto di un insediamento ebraico in Etiopia (1936-43),' *Storia Contemporanea*, vol.17, (6), December 1986, pp. 1083-1137 and R. Pankhurst, 'Plans for Mass Jewish Settlement in Ethiopia (1936-1943), *Ethiopia Observer*, vol.15, (4), 1973, pp. 235-245.

the countries ruled by Nazi-Fascists' powers."<sup>79</sup> He proposed to send a few hundred Jewish refugee professionals to areas surrounding Falasha settlements where "they could find shelter and employment." Faitlovitch asserted that the idea of settling refugees was seen in a favourable light by many local Ethiopian leaders, some of whom were "eagerly looking forward to have a considerable number of such immigrants established in their domains."<sup>80</sup> He also thought that it was preferable to send to Ethiopia refugees who were previously engaged in "liberal professions, physicians, engineers, technicians and of other callings useful to the development of the country." Even artisans such as carpenters, joiners, tailors and shoe makers could, he maintained, find work and earn a living in the larger centres. However, Faitlovitch also stated that "we must not think of big numbers and not of immigrants to be settled"

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<sup>79</sup> Faitlovitch to Goodman, 23 April 1943, FC no.132. This issue had been discussed prior to 1935. Indeed, up until the Italian occupation, it had been proposed to create in Ethiopia "a refuge for a limited number of persecuted Jews seeking a new home." (Faitlovitch, 'Review of the Pro-Falasha Work,' FC no.113). In spite of the fact that the proponents of this scheme considered the emperor to be in favour of the settlement of some groups of Jews in the country (Faitlovitch to the American Pro-Falasha Committee, 19 August 1934, AJDC Archives, New York, file no.433), they realised that Ethiopia was "still too primitive to be attractive." (Women's Division of the American Pro-Falasha Committee, 'Fashion Show, Bridge Musical and Tea,' 11 March 1931). If, however, the standards of the Falashas could be raised, this, they proposed, would "prepare the way of [a] large influx." (Ibid.)

<sup>80</sup> Faitlovitch to H.G. Howe, His British Majesty's Minister, Addis Ababa, 12 April 1943, BZ no.6/1/1/4.

in Ethiopia.<sup>81</sup> It was to be a temporary situation but one that Faitlovitch hoped would assist him in his programme by 1) gaining the support of Haile Sellassie and local leaders; 2) bringing the Falashas into contact with Western Jewry and vice versa.

**d) The Establishment of Contact Between Falashas and Zionist Pioneers and The Establishment of a Falasha Kibbutz in Ethiopia**

By 1948, there was also the suggestion to organise a type of spiritual refuge in certain Falasha villages or even camps for the youth of the national Zionist type.<sup>82</sup> However, the idea which Faitlovitch considered to be the most appropriate was the establishment of a Kibbutz for the training of Falashas, based on the Palestinian model.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, Faitlovitch and his followers believed that the establishment of close contact between the Zionist pioneers in Palestine and the Falashas would be most beneficial for their programme. It was proposed therefore initially to send about hundred young Falashas to Palestine where they would be trained by the Zionists.<sup>84</sup> None the less, with considerable foresight, they understood the possible danger that the Falashas might not wish to return to Ethiopia

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> R. Sauter to Faitlovitch, 2 October 1946, FC no.100.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. and Faitlovitch to Sauter, 10 December 1946, FC no.117.

<sup>84</sup> Sauter to Faitlovitch, 24 January 1947, FC no.117.

following their training,<sup>85</sup> as indeed proved to be the case the following decade.

e) The Re-establishment of Contact Between Falashas and Western Jewry

In spite of the fact that Haile Sellassie was seen to be favourable towards the resumption of activities on behalf of the Falashas,<sup>86</sup> Faitlovitch and his colleagues were aware that the realisation of their plan 'to assist' them would depend largely on support from British, and especially American Jewry.<sup>87</sup> The Falashas were considered "in no way in [a] position to set up and maintain by themselves a Jewish and secular schooling system adequate ... for the uplifting and preservation of their communities."<sup>88</sup> This was especially true after the deviation of Faitlovitch's ex-pupils from what he called

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> According to Faitlovitch, Haile Sellassie had granted him "suitable quarters, land and the necessary buildings" in Gondar "for the purpose of establishing there a school for the Falashas." (Faitlovitch to Goodman, 23 April 1943, FC no.132). This occurred some time between July 1942 and March 1943 (Faitlovitch to Solomon, 19 November 1945, p.1, FC no.117).

<sup>87</sup> Faitlovitch professed that cultural activities carried out by American Jews for the Falashas would be "sympathetically seen by many of the high authorities of the country." He believed America to have a "considerable influence on the rulers of Abyssinia and consequently they welcome and to some extent encourage every enterprise coming from the States." (Faitlovitch to Solomon, 19 November 1945, p.3, FC no.117).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.1.

"leur vocation" and "[le] programme leur tracé."<sup>89</sup>

A proposal was therefore made that, in the first instance, an American citizen who was a) well-trained in Jewish and pedagogic studies and b) a traditional, orthodox or conservative Jew, should be sent to Ethiopia to direct the educational work amongst the Falashas.<sup>90</sup> Secondly, the Pro-Falasha committee in America, whose work had been interrupted during the war, was to be re-established. This organisation would have the following tasks-:

1) "To restore the connection of the Falashas with Israel which has been broken for so many centuries, to revivify and strengthen Judaism among them, and to ameliorate their social and economic conditions."

2) To set up "an institute in Palestine, in which pupils from Abyssinia ... whose ties with Israel have for long time been severed, shall be educated in Jewish cultural surroundings, religiously and professionally, in order that they may become fitted to devote the knowledge which they would acquire into the service of the conservation and promotion of

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<sup>89</sup> Faitlovitch to Sauter, 10 December 1946, FC no.117. Faitlovitch claimed that "si mes ex-élèves n'avaient pas dévié ... on aurait peut-être pu venir à bout de ses difficultés."

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. Faitlovitch was unable to find a suitable teacher for the Falashas whilst he was in Palestine.

Although the handful of people involved in the Pro-Falasha campaign understood that the task to gain support for their project would not be easy because of the tragedy which had befallen European Jewry, they also felt a sense of duty to assist surviving Jews in jeopardy, wherever possible. As they believed the Falashas to have undergone a similar fate to that of European Jewry and to be desperate for assistance, Faitlovitch and his supporters were determined to campaign extensively to save "these Jews ... from extinction."<sup>92</sup> They hoped, therefore, that the funds which were being raised for other Jewish communities would also be used to assist the Falashas.<sup>93</sup> Tamrat Imanuél declared that the resumption of Pro-Falasha activities depended on "la bonne disposition des Juifs d'Amérique."<sup>94</sup>

However, one aspect which was fundamental to this campaign was the attitude of world Jewry towards the Falashas.

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<sup>91</sup> Document in Faitlovitch Collection, file no.82. (undated)

<sup>92</sup> Faitlovitch to Solomon, 19 November 1945, p.4, FC no.117. See also Shelemay, *Song of Longing*, p.147 for a comparison with the situation in the 1970's. She discusses the "almost fanatical commitment to the Beta Israel" by those who felt guilt over the "inability of the American Jewish community to save European Jewry during the Holocaust." For some, the Falasha cause was thus "a rare opportunity to in some way compensate for the earlier tragedy, a chance to rescue Jewish lives in jeopardy."

<sup>93</sup> Faitlovitch to Solomon, 19 November 1945, p.4, FC no.117.

<sup>94</sup> Tamrat Imanuél to Solomon, 22 June 1947, FC no.137.

Indeed, if any assistance was to be forthcoming for the Falashas, particularly following the Holocaust, they would have to be considered Jews in the full sense of the name. It might therefore now be appropriate to summarize the image of the Falashas held by world Jewry up until the creation of the State of Israel.

#### The Attitude of World Jewry Towards the Falashas Prior to 1948.

As we determined in chapter 5, the Falashas had not undergone any major transformation in their identity or religion prior to the Italian occupation. We also saw how Faitlovitch attempted to portray the Falashas as a Jewish tribe who had been separated from world Jewry for thousands of years but which had nevertheless managed to preserve their Judaism. One can therefore conclude that if world Jewry was to consider the Falashas as co-religionists, this acceptance would have to be based primarily on the acceptance of the accuracy of Faitlovitch's reports concerning the Falashas.

This is not the place to analyse the Halachic (Jewish legal) authorities' interpretation of the Falashas' religious identity prior to the establishment of the State.<sup>95</sup> It is sufficient to mention that the Rabbis' decisions ranged from Rabbi Kook's recognition of the

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<sup>95</sup> For further information see Kaplan, 'History, Halakha and Identity,' pp.13-24, Corinaldi, *Ethiopian Jewry*, pp.193-213; Waldman, *Beyond the Rivers*, pp.249-256.



Falashas as Jews<sup>96</sup> to Rabbi Uziel's decree in 1942 that the Falashas were not complete Jews.<sup>97</sup> What is more important here is the fact that very few people were involved directly or indirectly in the Pro-Falasha campaign worldwide, be it by way of raising funds, verbal support or other forms of encouragement. This is indicated by the lack of sufficient donations to Faitlovitch's project which caused much disarray to Pro-Falasha committees and their activities throughout the years.

It is difficult to ascertain if Western Jewry's apathetic attitude towards the Falashas was a result of racist prejudices, more pressing priorities, sheer ignorance, or a general feeling of suspicion concerning their Jewish identity.<sup>98</sup> It is self evident, however, that Faitlovitch's campaign to turn the sympathetic attention of Western Jewry in the Falashas' favour, to convince them of their connection to Judaism and the Jewish people and to gain

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<sup>96</sup> On 4 December 1921, Abraham Isaac Kook, the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine, addressed an appeal to world Jewry "to save our Falasha brethren from extinction and to rescue 50,000 souls of the House of Israel from oblivion." (Kessler, *Falashas*, p.144.

<sup>97</sup> This was declared at a one-off meeting on 16 June 1942 of a committee organised by Faitlovitch and included Ben Zvi and the Chief Rabbi of Palestine. This committee set itself the task of "returning the dispersed of Israel, the Falashas, to their origins." (FC no.82). Rabbi Herzog also dealt with this problem in his correspondence with Faitlovitch in which he stated that their Jewish origin and descent was highly doubtful. (See M. Waldman, 'Letters of Itsak Ben Zvi on the Ethiopian Jews,' *Pe'amim*, vol. 22, 1985, pp.80-82).

<sup>98</sup> It would seem that each of these points contributed variously to the attitude of world Jewry.

their support for his campaign proved to be a failure prior to the establishment of the State of Israel.

In the post-Holocaust period, Faitlovitch soon perceived that in order to attract people's sympathies to the Falashas' cause, it would be necessary to expand the scope of his activities. This would be achieved by encompassing his Pro-Falasha activities into a wider framework. Together with his few supporters, he founded the Society for the Dispersed of Israel in 1951 in Tel Aviv. The purpose of this society was to re-connect with mainstream Judaism, 'Jewish tribes,' whose contact with world Jewry had been severed.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, the first activity of the Committee was to be the "presentation of spiritual help" to the Falashas a) by means of schools b) by sending "religious and enlightened" teachers from Palestine to teach Torah, and c) by training teachers in Palestine.<sup>100</sup> The Falashas were in fact declared to be undoubtedly "the most important of all the dispersed of Israel."<sup>101</sup> Although the society and its forerunner<sup>102</sup> bore no significant practical results, Faitlovitch gained an important

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<sup>99</sup> Document in Faitlovitch Collection entitled - 'The Society for the Dispersed of Israel - Summary of Information on the Falashas,' undated, FC no.82.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> World Zionist Organisation, Dept. of Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora, 'The Dispersed of Israel - A General Survey,' April 1952, FC no.82 and Rabbi Gold to Hayim Gavrihu, 22 December 1951, BZ no.6/1/1/6.

<sup>102</sup> See footnote 97.

supporter, Itsak Ben Zvi, the future President of Israel,<sup>103</sup> whose name soon became associated with that of the cause of the Falashas.<sup>104</sup>

#### The Question of The Falashas Following the Creation of the State of Israel

With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, a new Pro-Falasha campaign was initiated, one which was to take a very different form and culminate in unprecedented results. It would seem that initially Faitlovitch and the American Pro-Falasha Committee believed that the newly formed State would be prepared to accept the Falashas as part of the 'Ingathering of Exiles' Programme. However, it was also felt by those concerned that prior to their immigration or *aliyah* to Israel it would be necessary to prepare the Falashas, and especially the youth, for *aliyah*.<sup>105</sup> Tamrat Imanuél, the 'representative' of the Falashas at the time, was quite adamant that the Falashas first needed to be educated. He asserted that if Judaism wanted to save this "restant d'Israel, il n'y a autre moyen

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<sup>103</sup> Ben Zvi became the second President of Israel in December 1952.

<sup>104</sup> For an analysis of Ben Zvi's campaign to assist the Falashas see Waldman, 'The Letters of Itsak Ben Zvi,' pp.75-88.

<sup>105</sup> On 31 March 1949, the officers of the American Pro-Falasha Committee met together with representatives of the Jewish Agency to discuss plans for "setting up a Training Centre in Ethiopia, in order to prepare those Falashas who may want to emigrate to Israel for settlement in that country." D.L Davis, Secretary of the American Pro-Falasha Committee, 1 April 1949, FC no.142.

que l'instruction hebraique."<sup>106</sup> Once they were sufficiently educated, Tamrat proposed that small numbers of Falashas should 'go on aliyah' in an attempt to redress the stereotypical picture held by much of Jewish officialdom and perhaps pave the way for future large scale immigration.<sup>107</sup> Tamrat Imanuél further proposed that as the Falashas in Ethiopia were widely scattered, the distance between each location was great, and the density of the Falasha population was low, that the establishment of a school in each region would be a waste of time and energy. He suggested that "l'unique moyen de résoudre le problème d'enseignement est de réunir un nombre d'élèves dans un seul lieu" - in Gondar.<sup>108</sup>

Nevertheless, by 1950 a decision had already been made by the Israeli government which negated the possibility of allowing a large-scale Falasha immigration into the country.<sup>109</sup> In spite of the fact that the Falashas "dream

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<sup>106</sup> Tamrat Imanuél to Dr. Schwarzbart, 13 September 1949, ZA no.Z6/242. See also *Davar*, 5 December 1949. Tamrat was apparently quite dispassionate about an immediate immigration of Falashas to Israel. He believed that it was first necessary to educate them so that "they would not arrive as illiterates and constitute a lower class." (Messing, *Story*, p.67).

<sup>107</sup> Yona Bogale and Mark Squires, 'Tamrat Imanuél,' (unpublished notes), Ben Zvi Archives.

<sup>108</sup> Tamrat Imanuél to Schwarzbart, 13 September 1949, ZA no.Z6/242.

<sup>109</sup> The Israeli government policy towards the Falashas in the 1940's and 50's should also be examined in the context of Israel-Ethiopia relations at this time. As the Israeli government was attempting to strengthen ties with Ethiopia, they did not want to 'rock the boat' by

to return to Zion" and were very useful for their arts and crafts skills, *aliyah* was not deemed to be an immediate option.<sup>110</sup> It was in fact proposed that a degree of intensive education was first needed for the Falashas which should include a study of Hebrew and the organisation of Jewish communities.<sup>111</sup> In addition, it was recommended that ten young Falashas should be sent to Israel "to complete their studies" so that they could then return to Ethiopia to initiate a programme of "guidance and organisation." Only after a "correct and proper programme" could the possibility of a limited *aliyah* be considered.<sup>112</sup>

The rejection of the idea of Falasha *aliyah* was expressed more viciously in a report which claimed that the Falashas should not be brought to Israel since they were suffering

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interfering with internal Ethiopian affairs, especially considering Ethiopia's relations with the Arab world. For example, Shmuel Be'eri, the Jewish Agency's first emissary to Ethiopia, was informed that he was not to discuss the issue of Falasha *aliyah* with Haile Sellassie nor was he to mention the murder of Falashas which had taken place. (Be'eri to Gold, 'The Political Situation of the Falashas,' 3 May 1954, ZA no. Z6/865). See also E. Leviatan, *The Encounter between the Falasha of Ethiopia and Modern Jewry*, (manuscript), 1977, p.11, (Hebrew). For a full analysis of Ethiopia-Israel relations see H. Ehrlich, 'Israel-Ethiopia Relations 1935-1995,' in Appleyard et al., (eds.), *Proceedings*, (forthcoming).

<sup>110</sup> Report of the visit to Ethiopia of Dr. Y. Weinstein, Aliyah Department, 14-16 November 1949, ZA no.S6/6287.

<sup>111</sup> This issue will be discussed below.

<sup>112</sup> Report of the visit to Ethiopia of Weinstein, 14-16 November 1949, ZA no.S6/6287. He was particularly concerned "to save" the Falasha youth.

from contagious diseases.<sup>113</sup> This account was later strenuously denied by the Jewish Agency<sup>114</sup> and subsequently exploited to the advantage of Faitlovitch and the Pro-Falasha Committee<sup>115</sup> who publicised this "cruel canard" in the Jewish press.<sup>116</sup> Several months later the Aliyah department of the Jewish Agency sent Faitlovitch a list of 220 Falashas who were residing in Addis Ababa and wanted to emigrate to Israel.<sup>117</sup> This was no doubt a conciliatory measure carried out by the Jewish Agency in their desire to ease the situation and combat the bad publicity that

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<sup>113</sup> A Jewish Telegraphic Agency Dispatch dated Jerusalem, 6 February 1950, (FC no.115) reported that an Israeli medical mission, apparently at the behest of the JDC, had brought back a report from Ethiopia alleging that the Falashas were "suffering from an inherited infectious disease." (Report by L. Rittenberg, presented to the campaign committee of the American Pro-Falasha Committee, 16 March 1950, FC no.142).

<sup>114</sup> A press release of 2 May 1950 from the Aliyah Department of the Jewish Agency stated that "according to information at our disposal, the Jewish Agency has at no time made mention of any diseases that might hinder the immigration of the Falasha Jews into Israel. Nor has the Jewish Agency any knowledge of the claim that the Israeli government had ever objected to the immigration of the Jews in question. [It was] also stated that no medical mission whatsoever has visited Abyssinia." (FC no.115).

<sup>115</sup> At first the Pro-Falasha Committee was unsure whether the report was reliable or not. Rittenberg, whose knowledge of the Falashas depended on books and conversations with Faitlovitch, stated that if the report was correct "it may well be that the American Pro-Falasha Committee needs to become an American 'Prophylactic' Committee." (Rittenberg to Faitlovitch, 3 March 1950, FC no.115).

<sup>116</sup> Report by Louis Rittenberg, 16 March 1950, FC no.142. See for example the press release of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 28 February 1950.

<sup>117</sup> N. Ben Menahem, Aliyah Department of the Jewish Agency, to Faitlovitch, 14 January 1951, FC no.115.

resulted from the 'fictitious' report. Nevertheless, this document made no mention of permission being granted to these aspiring immigrants.

*"A Return to Judaism Precedes Aliyah"*<sup>118</sup>

Israeli government officials admitted that "emigration for the Falashas was not an urgent priority" since "there [were] no elements of emergency in their situation."<sup>119</sup> There would also seem to have been a "considerable question as to whether the Falashas [could] really be considered Jews since they retain only a semblance of Jewish religious practices and [were] integrated with the cultural environment in which they [found] themselves."<sup>120</sup> The Jewish Agency, in fact, declared that there were no real differences between the Falashas and other Ethiopians.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Hayim Gavrihu to Rabbi Z. Gold, 22 December 1951, BZ no.6/1/1/6. The aim to return the Falashas to Judaism is misleading. As we will see, the Jewish Agency officials were not concerned to preserve the Falashas' culture, rather they sought to bring their religious beliefs and observances in line with traditional Judaism. This process is still continuing in Israel today. (See Kaplan and Rosen, 'Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel,' pp.35-37).

<sup>119</sup> Conversation with Arthur Lourie, Israel Consul General, as recorded by Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, 24 April 1950, FC no.142. Another Israeli official explained that the Israeli government had to give priority to "emergency situations" such as Jewish immigrants from Iraq, Eastern Europe and the Middle East "who must come to Israel out of dire necessity." (I. Kenen of Embassy of Israel, Washington D.C., to E. Gomberg, Allied Jewish Appeal, 1 May 1950, FC no.142).

<sup>120</sup> Conversation with Arthur Lourie, 24 April 1950, FC no.142.

<sup>121</sup> The Jewish Agency, Aden, to the Aliyah Department, 5 March 1950, ZA no.S6/6242.

Some Israeli government officials were none the less determined to show that there was "utterly no discrimination based on colour"<sup>122</sup> as "Judaism is not a race."<sup>123</sup> The government of Israel, they claimed, "maintains an open door policy for all Jews who wish to come to Israel."<sup>124</sup> It was therefore understood by the parties concerned that if the Falashas were to be brought to Israel, a "return to Judaism" would first be necessary.

#### A New Leadership for the Falashas

In order to achieve this "return to Judaism," several Jewish visitors to Ethiopia proposed to encourage Faitlovitch's ex-pupils to direct an intensive educational programme for the Falashas. Although several of these pupils were already involved in an informal capacity,<sup>125</sup> it was felt that they needed to fully dedicate their training

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<sup>122</sup> Kenen to Gomberg, 1 May 1950, FC no. 142.

<sup>123</sup> Gavrihu to Gold, 22 December 1951, p.7, BZ no.6/1/1/6.

<sup>124</sup> Kenen to Gomberg, 1 May 1950, FC no.142.

<sup>125</sup> Yona Boggalä had led a delegation of Falashas to request permission for aliyah from Israeli authorities (Jewish Agency, Aden, to Aliyah Dept., 5 March 1950, ZA no.S6/6242). It would seem that he may have been instrumental in adversely affecting or limiting missionary work in his capacity as a clerk at the ministry of education. (CMJ, 'The Story of the Mission,' no date, CMJ Archives, Bodleian Library). Yona Boggalä also accompanied several Israeli emissaries around Ethiopia. (See for example report of A. Rosenfeld on his trip to the Falashas, 21 November 1951, FC no.127). Finally, Taddäsä Ya'qob, who was director of Customs for the Ethiopian government, accepted responsibility as a volunteer for the Committee Programme in Ethiopia and helped to organise ten village classes for 200 students. (Report for 1949, American Pro-Falasha Committee, FC no. 142).



and education to the Falasha cause.<sup>126</sup> They were presented by one Israeli representative as evidence that it was possible for the Falashas to attain "spiritual and intellectual fulfilment."<sup>127</sup>

At first, Faitlovitch was opposed to the idea of utilising his ex-pupils and was condemnatory of other peoples' attempts to do so.<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless, when he realised that his endeavour to find the 'correct person'<sup>129</sup> to go to

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<sup>126</sup> Wolf Leslau claimed that "you seldom find a man as honest as Mr. Taddesse" (W. Leslau to Rabbi Davis, 15 February 1950, FC no. 142) who would be very useful for the educational programme; Rosenfeld recommended Yona Boggalä as headmaster of a planned school ('Report,' 21 November 1951, FC no.127); He also recommended Mängestu Sänbätu as one of the teachers; Tamrat Imanuél also put forward Taddäsä Yaqob's name as a representative of the Falashas even though he was a member of a group "qui s'intéresse à donner aux Falashas une organisation moderne." (Tamrat Imanuél to Schwarzbart, 13 September 1949, FC no.137).

<sup>127</sup> Rosenfeld, 'Report,' 21 November 1951, FC no.127.

<sup>128</sup> For example, Faitlovitch was critical of Leslau's recommendation "to subsidise certain so-called teachers" in Ethiopia. He believed that this created an "embarrassing position of lending indirect aid and prestige to that group of irresponsible young Falashas which condones assimilation and the eventual disappearance of the Falashas as Jews." (Faitlovitch to Kramer, 26 February 1950, FC no.142).

<sup>129</sup> Faitlovitch asserted that the correct person was not someone like Wolf Leslau who would be unable to "ascertain the spiritual needs of the Falashas" (for "any person not a devout Jew is taboo" for them). No amount of scholarship, he claimed, would make "a casual investigator welcome nor inspire confidence among the faithful Falashas." Faitlovitch recommended a young, married, religious and educated American Jew whom he would first instruct in the fundamentals of Falasha habits, customs and languages. Armed with these qualifications, "the Falashas would undoubtedly receive him with open arms and entrust to him their youth for Jewish education." The person whom he had in mind and subsequently interviewed was a young American Hebraist who taught French at Yeshiva University. (Faitlovitch to Kramer, 26 February 1950, FC no.142).

Ethiopia and "revitalise the work"<sup>130</sup> had failed, he succumbed to the general consensus. In a letter dated 14 December 1951, he called upon his ex-pupils to emulate the Jews of other countries and to encourage other Falashas to do the same. Faitlovitch wrote that he believed his ex-pupils would form the nucleus of the elite of the Falashas and serve as intermediaries between Israel and their co-religionists.<sup>131</sup> He was, however, critical of his ex-pupils' inertia. He asserted that "la velléité seule ne suffit pas à effectuer l'action de régénération" of the Falashas, "il faut s'y appliquer avec énergie, persévérance, abnégation de soi-même, et être prêt à faire tous les sacrifices utiles pour la cause." He called upon them to bring some Falashas who were "présentables et non dépravés" into direct and personal contact with the Jewish world and Israel "pour plaider leur cause et supplier aide et secours des corréligionnaires."<sup>132</sup> The results of his pleas will be examined below.

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<sup>130</sup> Faitlovitch at this time was too weak to resume the work himself.

<sup>131</sup> Faitlovitch to Mekuria, 14 December 1951, FC no.118.

<sup>132</sup> Faitlovitch to Mekuria, 17 July 1952, FC no.118. Faitlovitch was under the impression that Yona Boggalä intended to come to Israel. His presence in Israel, Faitlovitch claimed, would have been very beneficial in the campaign to resolve the question of the Falashas.

### The Jewish Agency's Programme in Ethiopia 1953-58<sup>133</sup>

In 1953, the Israelis in effect took over the educational and relief efforts from most Pro-Falasha committees which still existed, in name at least, in Europe and the U.S.A.<sup>134</sup> With the initiation of the Jewish Agency's Programme in 1953, the organisation's representatives could now count on the support of two former pupils of Faitlovitch; Taddäsä Yaqob and Yona Boggalä.

The first emissary of the Jewish Agency to Ethiopia, Rabbi Shmuel Be'eri claimed that the Falashas were on a low spiritual plane.<sup>135</sup> They knew they were erring in their religion, he professed, but were not in a position to rectify their religion as there was no contact with the outside world.

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<sup>133</sup> Although this theme has been tackled by several authors in the past, none of the previous attempts discuss, in any detail, the methods and processes adopted by Israeli officials to achieve their set objectives. Instead, authors such as Waldman and Corinaldi have focused on the individuals involved and their respective reports without critically analysing the methodology employed and the results of their schemes. In this analysis, I will be examining hitherto unpublished documents, together with interviews, to investigate the aims of the Israeli representatives. I will then analyse the methods used by the Jewish Agency emissaries such as the development of a new Falasha leadership. Finally, I will examine the impact of the Falashas' encounter with Israeli officials on Falasha society. (Cf. Waldman, *Beyond the Rivers*, pp. 233-267; Waldman, *From Ethiopia to Jerusalem: The Jews of Ethiopia in Modern Times*, (Jerusalem, 1993), pp.144-186; Corinaldi, *Ethiopian Jewry*, pp. 179-184).

<sup>134</sup> Abbink, *Falashas in Ethiopia and Israel*, p.93.

<sup>135</sup> See report by Be'eri to Gold, 18 February 1954, BZ no.6/1/1/6.

Be'eri thus proposed that an institute for the Falashas be established in Asmara,<sup>136</sup> a proposal which was given a favourable reception by Yona Boggalä<sup>137</sup> and organisations interested in the welfare of the Falashas. The purpose of this school was to "afford an opportunity to educate between thirty and fifty students, around whom a new Falasha community could be established."<sup>138</sup> The pupils of the school would, it was claimed, be "the future leaders of their people"<sup>139</sup> after having gained a knowledge of Hebrew

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<sup>136</sup> 'Extract of letter from Shmuel Be'eri, emissary of the department for Torah education and culture in the Diaspora, re: educational activity among the Beta Israel (Falashas) in Ethiopia,' 1954, ZA no.Z6/875).

<sup>137</sup> Yona Boggalä to A. Rosenfeld, 26 June 1953, FC no.127. Yona believed Asmara to be an appropriate location as a) they were free to teach what they wanted; b) it was easier to communicate with Israel and other countries; c) there was a community and synagogue; d) the town was more developed than towns in Ethiopia; e) health facilities were more abundant in Asmara; f) the pupils could learn professions from the Italians located there; g) teachers who would come to Asmara would find a more cultured life there.

<sup>138</sup> As we saw in chapter one, there was no formal centralised organisation for the Falashas. In spite of the convenience to speak of a 'Falasha community,' instead "a large number of scattered communities existed with informal economic, political, marital and religious ties." (Kaplan, 'Leadership and Communal Organization,' p.157). In their desire to 'assist' the Falashas and transplant traditional Jewish life to Ethiopia, the Jewish Agency officials were keen to promote the establishment of an artificial unity on the Falashas. (Ibid. p.158.) Be'eri, for example, believed the Falashas should be organised and reformed into a community based on a traditional Jewish model with Rabbis, ritual slaughterers, teachers and leaders. (Be'eri as quoted in Waldman, *From Ethiopia to Jerusalem*, p.172).

<sup>139</sup> Meeting of the Committee on Cultural-Religious Affairs of the Joint Distribution Committee, 8 December 1953, AJDC files. To facilitate the establishment of an Ethiopian Jewish community, a young educated leadership was encouraged to represent the Falashas and liaise with foreign Jewish organisations. This, as we will see, had the

and Judaism in general.

Be'eri also proposed to teach Jewish Law, customs and general Judaism to Falasha priests. He was particularly interested in instructing them in the precepts of traditional Jewish dietary laws, ritual slaughter and Sabbath laws and those concerning the purity of family. After four months, the priests were to be replaced with new recruits. He planned to accompany the new graduates from the institute to Gondar where he would assist in their integration as teachers for the Falashas. Be'eri declared that in order to change certain aspects of the Falashas' lives, it was necessary to gain the support of someone who was "close to their spirit, [was] one of them and [had] an influence on them." The ideal person was, in his opinion, Yona Boggalä who was described as well-educated and a "devoted and faithful Jew."<sup>140</sup>

The aim to encourage a new type of leadership for the Falashas to be composed of reformed traditional leaders, former students of Faitlovitch and recent graduates was characteristic of the Jewish Agency's activities at this time. Be'eri believed that only with the creation of this

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effect of undermining traditional Falasha leadership. (See Kaplan and Rosen, 'Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel,' p.41).

<sup>140</sup> Extract of letter from Shmuel Be'eri, 1954, ZA no.Z6/875.

new type of leadership,<sup>141</sup> to be accomplished through an educational campaign, could the Falashas begin "their return to Judaism."<sup>142</sup>

To this end, on the 27 December 1953, a school was opened<sup>143</sup> in Asmara under the auspices of the Department for Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora of the Jewish Agency. There were initially 24 students from different areas comprising of 7 priests, 15 young men<sup>144</sup> and 2 young women. The institute which was named 'For the Dispersed of Israel' had boarding facilities and provided meals, clothes,<sup>145</sup> footwear and medical care for its students.<sup>146</sup> According to Be'eri, the teachers of the

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<sup>141</sup> According to Leviatan, Be'eri aimed "to train a new generation of leaders and spiritual instructors, knowledgeable of the Judaic Torah, and Hebrew teachers." (Leviatan, *Encounter*, p.54).

<sup>142</sup> S. Be'eri, 'The Programme, The Actual Achievements and the Final Aim of the Educational Work Among the Falashas in Ethiopia,' 29 June 1954, BZ no.6/1/1/6. Be'eri stated that all his activities were based on the concept of the return of the Falashas to Judaism.

<sup>143</sup> Haile Sellassie undoubtedly granted the Jewish Agency permission to establish this school for the Falashas as part of his campaign to develop education in the country. (See Balsvik, *Haile Sellassie's Students*, pp.4-5).

<sup>144</sup> Nine of these boys were apparently being prepared for aliyah. (Be'eri, 'The Programme,' 29 June 1954, BZ no.6/1/1/6).

<sup>145</sup> In the journal *Netivot* (vol. 4, 1955) of the Department for Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora, there is a picture of Be'eri teaching Falasha priests in the school. The priests are not wearing their traditional garb but are dressed in a western style.

<sup>146</sup> Be'eri, 'The Programme,' 29 June 1954, p.1, BZ no.6/1/1/6.

school, which included Yona Boggalä and himself, also "lived the lives of the pupils." Indeed, they ate with them and slept in the same huts as their students. This approach was intended to educate the pupils by way of example, so that they could view traditional Jewish practices and laws in operation such as the ritual washing of hands, prayers on arising and recitation of the 'Shema' prayer.<sup>147</sup>

The subjects that were taught to all pupils were Torah, prayer, Hebrew, Israel studies and maths.<sup>148</sup> They were also apparently given lessons in cleanliness, personal hygiene and fitness.<sup>149</sup> The priests received special lessons in Jewish religious practice and laws, three of whom were being trained to become principal instructors in Jewish education.<sup>150</sup> The emphasis was placed on Jewish religious practice and laws to fulfil "the real need to spread this

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<sup>147</sup> Be'eri, April 1956, quoted in Waldman, *From Ethiopia to Jerusalem*, p. 164.

<sup>148</sup> Be'eri claimed that one of his most difficult tasks was to find a correct and suitable method of education for these pupils. He did not know how to begin since, in his words, "he had never had experience in bringing 'the dispersed of Israel' back to Judaism." (Be'eri, April 1956, as cited by Waldman, *From Ethiopia to Jerusalem*, p.164).

<sup>149</sup> Interview with Mogäs Rahamim in Asriel Kamon (ed.), *The First Bridge: Testimonies of Jewish Ethiopian Pupils from Kfar Batya 1955-1995*, (Ramat Efal, 1996), p.17. (Hebrew).

<sup>150</sup> It was planned to keep the three Priests, who were being trained as the main instructors for the Falashas, in the institute for two years. The remaining four were to be replaced every four months after they had managed to learn to read Hebrew, to understand the prayers and principally, the Laws concerning the Jewish festivals.

knowledge amongst the Falashas."<sup>151</sup> The priests were therefore taught the following additional subjects: the weekly portion of the law, the laws of Passover, the laws of counting the Omer, the laws concerning festivals and their significance, the festivals of Purim and Hanukkah, the laws and customs of Sabbath, traditional Jewish prayers and laws of ritual slaughter.<sup>152</sup>

The school also served additional purposes. Firstly, it was used as a community centre for the Jews living in Asmara. Indeed, on religious and Israeli holidays, the employees of 'Incode' and other Jews living in the area celebrated the festivals together with the pupils and staff of the school.<sup>153</sup> Secondly, other young Falashas, besides the students, were occasionally hosted by the institute for short seminars which included a Sabbath.<sup>154</sup>

As well as the teaching in the school, Be'eri took the educational campaign beyond the walls of the institute. He believed that in order "to return the Falashas to a Jewish

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<sup>151</sup> Be'eri to Gold, 29 June 1954, p.5, BZ no. 6/1/1/6.

<sup>152</sup> This included visits to 'Incode,' the Israeli slaughter house in Asmara, where the laws were explained to the priests with practical demonstrations. (Be'eri, 'The Programme,' 29 June 1954, BZ no.6/1/1/6 and Interview with Abreham Kahati by Belaynesh Zevadiah, 23 September 1991, Oral Archives, Institute of Contemporary Jewry).

<sup>153</sup> Be'eri, 'The Programme,' p.2, 29 June 1954, BZ no. 6/1/1/6 and I. Even-Hen, 'The Falashas in Ethiopia are Returning to Judaism,' *Netivot*, 1955, no.4, p.63.

<sup>154</sup> Be'eri, 'The Programme,' 29 June 1954, BZ no.6/1/1/6.



way of life"<sup>155</sup> it was necessary a) to distribute calendars with the dates of traditional Jewish festivals to Falasha villages; b) to visit Falasha villages with Yona Boggalä prior to traditional Jewish festivals to explain their observances<sup>156</sup>; c) to distribute publications dealing with the laws of the festivals<sup>157</sup>; d) to distribute tracts of the *Shulhan Aruk* translated into Amharic.<sup>158</sup>

Although Be'eri believed that Asmara was initially the best location for the institute, he declared that it could not cater fully for "the great thirst of the Falashas for knowledge of the Torah." He recommended that the institute be relocated, at the end of 1955, to Bägämder where the largest concentration of the Falashas resided, and that two

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<sup>155</sup> Be'eri, April 1956, cited in Waldman, *From Ethiopia to Jerusalem*, p. 165.

<sup>156</sup> For example on Passover, they distributed *matzot* (unleavened bread) to Falasha villages and explained the laws and customs of the festival.

<sup>157</sup> Be'eri asserted that one of most important contributors to the 'correction' of the Falashas was the distribution of the publication 'The Jewish Festivals' which Yona Boggalä had translated from Hebrew into Amharic in 1954. This pamphlet included the main laws and customs of the Jewish months, Elul and Tishri, and a hundred passages from the 'Ethics of the Fathers,' together with Hebrew and Amharic Alpha Bets which were printed at the end. Yona Boggalä and Be'eri distributed this "first Rabbinic book to be printed in Hebrew" in Falasha villages before the Jewish New Year of 5715 (1955). (Be'eri, April 1956, cited in Waldman, *From Ethiopia to Jerusalem*, p.166).

<sup>158</sup> 'Extract of letter from Shmuel Be'eri,' 1954, ZA no.Z6/875.

other schools also be established in the area.<sup>159</sup> After three years, Be'eri speculated that the potential leaders and spiritual instructors would have been sufficiently instructed in a knowledge of Torah, Judaism and Hebrew. What is more, he also planned that within this period, most Falashas would have learned to pray in Hebrew, accepted Jewish laws and practices and organised themselves into communities for the promulgation of spiritual life. If these results were to occur, Be'eri opined that the Falashas would cease to be part of the "dispersed of Israel and would be a Jewish community in almost all of its meanings."<sup>160</sup>

#### The Kfar Batya Programme

On 20 January 1955, another important stage in the campaign to "return the Falashas to Judaism" was achieved, namely, the arrival of a group of 12 young Falashas in Israel to study at the Kfar Batya school under the auspices of the Jewish Agency.<sup>161</sup> Those selected were informed that they were to study temporarily in Israel in order to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to return to Ethiopia as

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<sup>159</sup> The schools would cater for pupils from surrounding villages with an estimated intake of 300 students at both Wezabä and Ugara, the planned locations for the schools. (Ibid.)

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> In one of the final letters Faitlovitch was to receive before his death, Hayim Gavrihu of the Jewish Agency described the arrival of the Falashas to Israel as "the first fruit" of our department's work in its endeavour to "return the dispersed of Israel to Judaism." (Gavrihu to Faitlovitch, 20 January 1955, FC no.99).

teachers and leaders for the Falashas.<sup>162</sup> They were to be considered emissaries for their people<sup>163</sup> who, on their return, would lead by example and help impart knowledge of Zionism and Judaism to the Falashas.<sup>164</sup>

According to testimonies from these students, the criteria used by Yona Boggalä to select 'suitable students' were based on age, knowledge of Amharic and ability to read in Hebrew.<sup>165</sup> Yona went around Falasha villages in the Gondar region to find volunteers to lend their children to this scheme.<sup>166</sup> Initially, parents were reluctant to consent as they recollected the fate of Faitlovitch's students, many of whom died overseas.<sup>167</sup> However, he soon managed to allay some of their fears by guaranteeing their return. Once Yona Boggalä had gained several families' confidence, others

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<sup>162</sup> Interview with Gebeyyehu Ademmegheh (uncertain spelling) in Kamon, *First Bridge*, p.19 and Interview with Akiva Baruk, *ibid.*, p.20. Prior to their departure, Haile Sellassie informed them that the purpose of their trip was to become teachers for all Ethiopians. (Interview with Gebeyyehu Ademmegheh, *ibid.*).

<sup>163</sup> Interview with Gebeyyehu Ademmegheh, *ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> Interview with Yafeh Eliyahu, *ibid.*, p.20.

<sup>165</sup> It is of no surprise that the majority of the young Falashas selected were former students of the school in Asmara. (Interview with Akiva Élyas, *ibid.*, p. 27).

<sup>166</sup> Interview with Abreham Qahati by Belaynesh Zevadiah, 23 September 1991 and interview with Gedaliah Uriah in Kamon, *First Bridge*, p.19.

<sup>167</sup> Interview with Yosef Zevadiah in Kamon, *First Bridge*, p.18.

flocked to present their children to the Kfar Batya scheme.<sup>168</sup>

Initially, it was very difficult for the young students from Ethiopia to adapt to life in Kfar Batya.<sup>169</sup> It would appear that no extra support was given to them in the way of Amharic interpretation. Indeed, as no-one in the institute was able to communicate with them in Amharic and they were in dormitories and classes with non-Ethiopians, the students found it necessary to learn Hebrew at a rapid pace.<sup>170</sup> They apparently slowly accustomed themselves to their new surroundings.<sup>171</sup>

The majority of their lessons were on Judaism and Hebrew and they studied very few secular subjects.<sup>172</sup> The first half of their day was devoted to studying and during the second half, they worked in nearby fields and in the

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<sup>168</sup> It would appear that some of the pupils in the first group were related. According to one of the graduates, Abreham Qahati, after his father had offered him to Yona Boggalä, Zimnah Berhané's father, (who was Abreham's Uncle), gave up his son. Subsequently, Abreham's two aunts then handed over their sons. (Interview with Abreham Qahati, *ibid.*, p.25).

<sup>169</sup> Interview with Abreham Qahati by Belaynesh Zevadiah, 23 September 1991.

<sup>170</sup> Interview with Zimnah Berhané in Kamon, *The First Bridge*, p.39.

<sup>171</sup> Interview with Yosef Zevadiah, interviewer: Steven Kaplan, 23 June 1991, Oral Archives of the Institute for Contemporary Jewry.

<sup>172</sup> Interview with Zimnah Berhané in Kamon, *First Bridge*, p.39 and Taddäsä Bayyuh, *ibid.*, p. 44.

dormitories.<sup>173</sup> They were also taught basic concepts of dress and hygiene.<sup>174</sup> It would also appear that their studies were frequently disrupted by visits from Israeli officials who were eager to meet the new "attraction" in Kfar Batya.<sup>175</sup>

Shmuel Be'eri, who visited the group in Kfar Batya shortly after their arrival, commented that the children were making an excellent impression by their external appearance due to their "delicateness and politeness and ... Jewish grace."<sup>176</sup> Another representative of the Jewish Agency also commended the "clean, polished and polite appearance of the Falashas" and credited it to the work that had been invested in these pupils.<sup>177</sup> Be'eri firmly believed that with the apparent success of the Kfar Batya programme, "the matter of the return of the Falashas to Judaism was back on a normal track."<sup>178</sup> It was therefore proposed that "due to the great success in the education of the first group in Kfar Batya," an additional group of students from Ethiopia be sent to Kfar Batya. Jewish Agency officials were certain

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<sup>173</sup> Interview with Gebeyyehu Ademmeqeh, *ibid.*, p.38.

<sup>174</sup> Interview with Yafeh Eliyahu, *ibid.*, p.45.

<sup>175</sup> Interview with Zimnah Berhané, *ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>176</sup> S. Be'eri, 'Survey of the Stages of Treatment in the Return of the Dispersed of Israel to Judaism' to President Ben Zvi, 6 February 1955, BZ no.6/1/1/6. Indeed, the male students donned kippot, the females were dressed modestly and all were called by their adopted Hebrew name.

<sup>177</sup> Gavrihu to Be'eri, 26 January 1955, ZA no.S75/5509.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

that "the education of the two groups of youngsters from this tribe would create for them a layer of leadership which would be able to raise the level of their lives and improve their situation."<sup>179</sup>

On 16 October 1956, a group of 15 young Falashas arrived in Israel for the second and final stage of the Kfar Batya programme.<sup>180</sup> This group was composed of much younger children, many of whom had studied in Ethiopia for eight years. The problems they experienced in Israel and on their return to Ethiopia were obviously more numerous and significant. Indeed, many complained that they forgot their identity and culture whilst living in Israel.<sup>181</sup>

The students from the first group were constantly reminded of the purpose of their stay in Israel and the task to be undertaken on their return to Ethiopia.<sup>182</sup> When they were informed that their return was imminent, they felt their education had been inadequate to equip them with the

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<sup>179</sup> Z. Gold to M. Cole, 14 December 1955, ZA no.S75/5508.

<sup>180</sup> Gavrihu to Personal Secretary of President Ben Zvi, 10 October 1956, ZA no.S75/5507. Prior to their departure from Ethiopia, Haile Sellassie met with this group to wish them good luck in their studies and to stress the importance of their education for the country as a whole.

<sup>181</sup> As the date of their return (1964) falls beyond the scope of this thesis, I will not be examining the second group's experience in Israel or Ethiopia. For more information see A. Kamon, *The First Bridge*, pp. 43-59 and 180-183.

<sup>182</sup> Interviews with Gedaliah Uriah and Haim Benasi in Kamon, *First Bridge*, p.37.

necessary skills and knowledge to be teachers and leaders.<sup>183</sup> Indeed, the idea of instructing their religious leaders caused some apprehension amongst the students. Itsak Ben Zvi attempted to reassure the students. He told them that they were returning as emissaries to prepare the Falashas for *aliyah* and that they were to be the "first bridge" to connect the Falashas to Israel and traditional Judaism.<sup>184</sup>

It was hoped that the Kfar Batya scheme would produce potential leaders and teachers for the Falashas. It was designed to create an Ethiopian Jewish prototype which would assist in drawing the Falashas to Judaism by way of example and education. The graduates were led to believe that a large scale *aliyah* for the Falashas was possible once they had achieved their objectives in Ethiopia. Some, however, also understood that they were part of an experiment to determine whether the Falashas were capable

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<sup>183</sup> Interview with Hayim Benasi, *ibid.*, p.37. When the students complained that the studies had been inadequate, they were allegedly informed that their education was sufficient for Ethiopia. (*Ibid.*) Taddäsä Bayyuh, a Kfar Batya graduate, asserted that their educational programme only included lessons on Judaism and Zionism. In his opinion, they should have devoted more time to secular subjects. (*Ibid.*, p.44). Aynehu Almanah, a graduate from the second group, recollects the controversy surrounding the return of the first group to Ethiopia after only three years. "The Jewish Agency officials said to them that it was sufficient - sufficient for their level of education and for those they were supposed to teach in Ethiopia. On the other hand, the youngsters claimed that they were not sufficiently trained and could not return to Ethiopia with such a [low] level of knowledge." (*Ibid.*, p.43).

<sup>184</sup> Interview with Zimnah Berhané in Kamon, *First Bridge*, p.40.

of being absorbed into Israeli society and to examine their potential contribution to the State.<sup>185</sup>

#### The Return of the Kfar Batya Students to Ethiopia

From the beginning of their stay in Israel, the two groups of young Falashas were aware of the fact that they were to return to Ethiopia following their period of study. They were clearly informed that they had not come on *aliyah* but were in Israel only on a temporary basis.<sup>186</sup> Indeed, although many of the students desired to remain in Israel, they were reminded of their responsibility to their brethren:- to educate and prepare them for possible *aliyah*.<sup>187</sup> In addition, they were also warned by Jewish Agency officials not to succumb to the temptation to enter into Ethiopian government service as previous individuals had done on returning from study abroad.<sup>188</sup>

It was reported that the young students from the first

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<sup>185</sup> Interview with Yosef Zevadiah by Kaplan, 23 June 1991.

<sup>186</sup> The Falashas who arrived were not considered *Olim* nor were they granted citizenship.

<sup>187</sup> Interview with Yoséf Dawit by Kaplan and Belaynesh Zevadiah, 7 August 1991. Yoséf Zevadiah claims that although he was aware of the fact that their presence in Israel was an experiment, he also understood that the Falashas back in Ethiopia depended on them. (Interview with Kaplan, 23 June 1991).

<sup>188</sup> Abreham Qahati claimed that they were forced to swear on a Bible to this effect. (Interview with Belaynesh Zevadiah, 23 September 1991 and in Kamon, *First Bridge*, p.91).



group returned<sup>189</sup> to Ethiopia on 25 November 1957 full of ideals, educated, and with a different outward appearance- they wore western clothes and all males had adopted the wearing of the skull cap or Kippah.<sup>190</sup> According to Yehuda Sivan, they made a favourable impression with their new image, their good behaviour and their idealism. Their teachers, he claimed, had succeeded in the Falashas' education.<sup>191</sup> They also apparently received a kit bag which contained Tephillin (phylacteries), Tsitsit (fringed undergarments),<sup>192</sup> and a Siddur (traditional Jewish prayer book)<sup>193</sup> as well as being given a Hebrew name.

Although the majority of the students seem to have initially resisted the pressure and temptations to work for the Ethiopian government,<sup>194</sup> the Jewish Agency failed to

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<sup>189</sup> Not all the Falashas from the first group returned to Ethiopia. Three members remained in Israel for further education and joined the second group.

<sup>190</sup> See picture in Kamon, *First Bridge*, p.71.

<sup>191</sup> Y. Sivan to Jewish Agency, 29 November 1957, State Archives (SA) no.350.1. and interview with Yehuda Sivan by Kaplan, 31 July 1991.

<sup>192</sup> Worn by observant Jews.

<sup>193</sup> Interview with Abreham Qahati by Belaynesh Zevadiah, 23 September 1991.

<sup>194</sup> Interview with Abreham Qahati, 23 September 1991. On their return to Ethiopia, Haile Sellassie encouraged the nine students to work for the Ethiopia government. According to the testimonies from Kfar Batya graduates they refused to succumb to the temptations of better wages and conditions, claiming that they were sent to Israel for the specific task of educating the Falashas. (See interviews with Gebeyyehu Ademmegh in Kamon, *First Bridge*, p. 83; Zimnah Berhané, *ibid*, p.84).

supply adequate provisions for their sustenance. Whereas most were able to find employment in one of the 10 Falasha schools (catering for 1200 students) established during the course of 1954 in the area of Gondar,<sup>195</sup> the Kfar Batya graduates were not provided with an adequate salary, relying instead on the support of their families.<sup>196</sup> What is more, the Jewish Agency did not provide them with appropriate teaching materials such as books and the distribution of food to the teachers and students was insufficient.<sup>197</sup>

According to their testimonies, some Kfar Batya graduates felt dejected and ashamed when they returned to their villages.<sup>198</sup> In addition to the difficulties in re-adjusting to life in Ethiopia, they believed that the Jewish Agency had failed and abandoned them.<sup>199</sup> As I mentioned above, they considered themselves ill-equipped and insufficiently educated and trained to be leaders and teachers of their people. Furthermore, some interviewees asserted that their credibility as educated and cultured

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<sup>195</sup> From Department for Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora to Department for Aliyah of Youth and Children, 28 September 1955, ZA no.SA/5509.

<sup>196</sup> Interview with Abreham Kahati in Kamon, *First Bridge*, p.91 and Gedaliah Uriah, *ibid.*, p.88.

<sup>197</sup> Interview with Gebeyyehu Ademmegah, *ibid.*, p.86.

<sup>198</sup> See Kamon, *First Bridge*, pp. 178-179.

<sup>199</sup> Interview with Gebeyyehu Ademmegah, *ibid.*, p.86.

people was weakened<sup>200</sup> since they relied on the support of the villagers when the support should have flowed in the opposite direction.<sup>201</sup>

Nevertheless, although the first stage of the Kfar Batya programme ostensibly appears to have been a failure, the young Falashas' encounter with the Western world and, especially with traditional Judaism, had significant repercussions in Falasha society. Indeed, as we will see below, on their return to Ethiopia the Kfar Batya graduates inadvertently posed a challenge to the traditional Falasha leadership as well as contributing to other important changes.

#### The Campaign for Change Continues

Yehuda Sivan, Be'eri's successor,<sup>202</sup> was sent to Ethiopia with the specific task of "converting the Falashas." He admitted in an interview that large-scale Aliyah was not a consideration at the time and that his main objective was "to bring them to and strengthen their Judaism."<sup>203</sup> Sivan conjectured that a centre for teacher training was needed in Asmara to introduce them to Jewish practices through the trained indigenous teachers. To Yona Boggalä, who was then

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<sup>200</sup> See Kamon, *First Bridge*, pp. 178-79.

<sup>201</sup> Interview with Gebeyyehu Ademmeqeh, *ibid.*, p.86.

<sup>202</sup> Be'eri eventually went to jail for embezzling funds. (Leviatan, *Encounter*, p.54).

<sup>203</sup> Read: bring their religious beliefs and practices into line with those of traditional Judaism.

considered to be the official representative of the Falashas and principal contact, he gave the responsibility of finding "suitable students"<sup>204</sup> to train as teachers. A centre was eventually established in which 33 males and females studied maths, geography and local history in Amharic and aspects of Judaism in Hebrew. This teacher training centre was in operation for approximately ten months.

Sivan strenuously denies the claim that there was any attempt to persuade the Falashas to cease certain practices. He did not want "to convince them that they were incorrect" and declared that it was up to the individual if he or she was to join the people of Israel and observe rabbinical laws. Sivan allegedly explained the differences between traditional Judaism and the Falashas' observances and gave them the option to decide.

It would appear, however, that Sivan too subscribed to the policy of creating a new type of leadership for the Falashas. He did not hold any discussions with the priests but instead addressed himself to recent graduates from institutes in Israel and Ethiopia.<sup>205</sup> He also intended to

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<sup>204</sup> Although Sivan stipulated that suitable students were those who had previous education, Yona Boggalä chose students using his own criteria, namely, those from the Gondar area and sometimes members of his own family. (Interview with Sivan by Kaplan, 31 July 1991).

<sup>205</sup> Interview. This blatant disregard and disrespect for the Falashas' traditional religious leadership by the Jewish Agency further weakened the priests' position in

create a new type of spiritual leadership for the Falashas (such as Rabbis and ritual slaughterers) by sending a few young men to train in Israel.<sup>206</sup> Finally, in his reports he described Yona Boggalä as "the leader of the Falashas" and aimed to encourage other 'intelligentsia' to attend a teacher training centre in Israel "in order that they alone would be able to lead the community."<sup>207</sup>

Sivan was confident that the young Falashas would accept traditional Jewish practices<sup>208</sup> and "would be good Jews." He also believed that *aliyah* would eventually be an option made available to them. Until that day arrived, he wanted to "strengthen them in their Judaism and to also provide them with our customs and our Laws."<sup>209</sup> To this end, during the course of 1957, Sivan and Yona Boggalä founded approximately 33 schools for the Falashas in villages around Gondar to provide traditional Jewish instruction for 1000 pupils.<sup>210</sup> According to Yona Boggalä, each school was

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Falasha society.

<sup>206</sup> Sivan to Dept. of Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora, 24 January 1958, SA. Although his plan was not carried out, Falasha priests and students were often taken to the Israeli-owned slaughter house, Incode, based in Asmara for a demonstration of ritual slaughter, according to traditional Jewish law. (See footnote no.152).

<sup>207</sup> Sivan to Dept. of Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora, 24 January 1958, SA.

<sup>208</sup> He was more sceptical about the older Falashas.

<sup>209</sup> Interview by Kaplan, 31 January 1991.

<sup>210</sup> This included two regional schools which catered for 100 pupils each and a boarding school in the "new area of the Falashas" - Wezabä - to which students came from all

run by one or two teachers, some of whom received training at the Addis Ababa school. The main purpose of these instructors, besides teaching the children, was "to maintain also the contact between the center in Ambobär and the far lying villages."<sup>211</sup>

This unprecedented campaign for education among the Falashas came to an abrupt end the following year when the Jewish Agency, "presumably for budgetary reasons," closed 31 of the 33 schools, thus "abandoning hundreds of semi-educated children."<sup>212</sup> The supporters of the Falasha cause were pessimistic about the continuation of the programme to assist the Falashas, particularly since the main advocate of this campaign, Jacques Faitlovitch, was no longer alive. This scepticism soon proved to be unfounded as the initiative to continue the processes that had already begun was taken over by international Jewish organisations such as the Organisation for Rehabilitation and Training (ORT), the Joint Jewish Distribution Committee, the Jewish

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Falasha localities.

<sup>211</sup> Yona Bogale, 'Short Memorandum on The Jewish Agency's Schools from 1954,' 8 March 1977, Ben Zvi Archives.

<sup>212</sup> ORT Union, Geneva, 20 March 1959, 'Report on Visit to Ethiopia.' ZA. It is possible that Israel Yeshayahu's report on his visit to Ethiopia in August 1958 affected the Jewish Agency's programme for the Falashas. The Speaker of the Knesset concluded his report by calling for a cessation of all educational facilities for the Falashas for "if we are not prepared to accept them as Jews," he declared, "what is the use of establishing and maintaining Hebrew schools for the Falashim [sic]." (I. Yeshayahu, 'Report on Visit to Eretria [sic] and Abyssinia,' 1958, ZA no.C6/91).

Colonial Association and the World Jewish Congress.<sup>213</sup> These organisations, with the assistance of those Falashas "qui s'intéresse à donner aux Falashas une organisation moderne,"<sup>214</sup> ensured the continuation of the pro-Falasha campaign and the changes that were initiated for the next two decades until Israel once again took over the programme.

#### The Impact of the Jewish Agency's Programme in Ethiopia.

According to a variety of documental and oral evidence, the Jewish Agency's programme in Ethiopia, although short-lived, had a significant long-term impact on the Falashas. As I will illustrate, the programme ignited a response and initiated processes and changes in their society that continued until the Falashas' immigration to Israel and which, to some extent, are still occurring today. Although the standard of education in the Agency's schools was reported to be "of the lowest standard"<sup>215</sup> it began a chain reaction which was to culminate in a transformation of the

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<sup>213</sup> See Waldman, *Beyond the Rivers*, p.270. According to Leviatan, these Jewish organisations were encouraged by the Israeli government to take over the work of the Jewish Agency in Ethiopia to prevent "political complications" between the two countries. (Leviatan, *Encounter*, p.17).

<sup>214</sup> Tamrat Imanuél to Schwarzbart, 13 September 1949, FC no.137. See J. Abbink, 'An Ethiopian Jewish 'Missionary' as Culture Broker' in M. Ashkenazi and A. Weingrod (eds.), *Ethiopian Jews and Israel*, (Oxford, 1987), pp.21-32.

<sup>215</sup> ORT Union, Geneva, 'Report on Visit to Ethiopia,' 20 March 1959, ZA.

majority of Falasha society.<sup>216</sup>

As we have seen, the students of the Jewish Agency's schools had lessons on a variety of Jewish practices and customs. According to the first emissaries of the Jewish Agency, the following achievements were made during the course of their religious education:-

- 1) After five months the pupils were able to speak Hebrew at the same level as a new immigrant to Israel.
- 2) They became aware of the following Jewish festivals and details of their practices: Passover, Shavuot (Pentecost), Tu Bishvat (New Year for Trees) and Purim.
- 3) Various traditional Jewish Sabbath practices were introduced such as lighting candles on Sabbath eve and songs associated with the Sabbath.
- 4) The students became familiar with the concept that sacrifice was not practised by Jews in the twentieth century.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> The transformation was not ubiquitous in all Falasha localities as there were geographical, educational and age factors involved. (see below)

<sup>217</sup> As we saw in previous sections, this point was previously promulgated by the Protestant missionaries and Faitlovitch.



- 5) The students began to worship using traditional Jewish prayers in Hebrew.

Jewish Agency officials were determined that these innovations should be disseminated to Falasha villages by the graduates of the schools. The first emissary, Shmuel Be'eri, initially counted on the priests to help "bring the Falashas back to Judaism." According to his reports, he was partially successful in his endeavours-:

- 1) Several of the priests, on returning to their villages, became teachers.<sup>218</sup>
- 2) Be'eri claimed that as a result of the priests' activities on the return to their villages, Hebrew songs could be heard in prayer houses in several Falasha villages.
- 3) Traditional Jewish prayers in Hebrew were also being adopted in prayer houses on the priests' return.
- 4) In several villages, the Falashas adopted the custom of eating three meals on the Sabbath in accordance with traditional Judaism.
- 5) Perhaps the most significant innovation introduced

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<sup>218</sup> Be'eri, 'Survey of the Stages of Treatment,' to Ben Zvi, 6 February 1955, BZ no.6/1/1/6

with the assistance of the 'educated' Priests was the adoption of an Israeli calendar which indicated the dates of Jewish festivals.<sup>219</sup> This occurred during the course of 1954 when 400 Falashas gathered in Wezabä to declare their acceptance of such a calendar. For the first time in their history, declared Be'eri, they celebrated Pentecost at its correct time.

6) At this same gathering, the Falashas declared their readiness to study the Torah according to traditional Judaism.

Jewish Agency officials soon realised that in order to achieve their aims it would be impractical and unrealistic to rely entirely on the retraining of priests.<sup>220</sup> As we have seen, they also enthusiastically advocated the development of a nucleus of educated young Falashas around whom a new leadership could be established. This, they claimed, would allow alterations in the Falashas' religion and way of life to be accepted more readily by the

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<sup>219</sup> Be'eri stated that with the acceptance of the Israeli calendar, "an additional deciding step was made towards their return to Judaism." (Ibid.) Cf. the Falashas' traditional calendar discussed in chapter one.

<sup>220</sup> A similar policy concerning the Falasha priests (or, as they are known in the Hebraised plural form, *qessim*) is operative today in Israel. As Kaplan and Rosen explain, "on a practical and juridical level, they have been stripped of all former aspects of their role in Ethiopia: they no longer serve clearly-defined communities or groups of believers and cannot officiate at weddings, sacrifices or funerals." (Kaplan and Rosen, 'Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel,' p.41.)

Falashas. These leaders would be composed of graduates from the schools in Asmara and Kfar Batya and led by former students of Faitlovitch.

With the initiation of the Jewish Agency's Programme in 1953, the organisation's representatives could count on the support of former pupils of Faitlovitch: Taddäsä Yaqob and more especially Yona Boggalä, and to some extent also on Mängestu Sänbätu and Reuben Isayas. These young men, together with Tamrat Imanuél, played a very important role in the modification of Falasha society as:-

- 1) they (especially Yona Boggalä) greatly assisted foreign Jewish organisations, including the Jewish Agency, to gain access to the Falasha villages.<sup>221</sup>
- 2) they were fundamental in setting up the schools and finding 'suitable students' for them with the potential to be future leaders.
- 3) they helped to impart knowledge of traditional Judaism and strengthen the connection between world Jewry and the Falashas.

The graduates of the Jewish Agency schools, and especially

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<sup>221</sup> Taddäsä Yaqob had the added advantage of maintaining good contacts with government officials. This allowed him to receive funds for the Falashas from foreign Jewish organisations and also to intervene, when necessary, with a policy that threatened the Falashas.

those students who returned from Kfar Batya, also had a significant impact in some areas in which they inhabited. On their return to their villages, these young educated Falashas began a process which challenged and would eventually undermine the authority of the elders and the priests, at least in some focal points.<sup>222</sup> One graduate reported that their return had "confused their people for previously the people followed the religious instructions of the elders and the *Kohanim*. Now they look to the teachers who have returned from Israel as their leaders and what they have learnt in Israel is often in conflict with traditional Falasha teachings."<sup>223</sup> Many Falashas now in fact respected and looked up to those who had been educated (especially abroad) and had contact with foreigners.<sup>224</sup> They also viewed with curiosity the western dress of those who had returned from Israel and the strange Jewish

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<sup>222</sup> This situation is reflected in a report conducted by ORT in 1959 in which a representative of this organisation described a scene at the village school of Ambobär. There, he witnessed, a gathering of three hundred Falashas:-"on the right the elders of the village and the priests with their coloured robes and multi-coloured umbrellas, then the adults and nearly two hundred boys and girls ranged in size right down to three year old tots. In front of them were their teachers conducting them in a just recognizable Hebrew version of *Havenu Shalom Alechem*. (ORT Union Geneva, 'Report on Visit to Ethiopia,' 20 March 1959, p.6, ZA.)

<sup>223</sup> Ibid. According to a report from Zimnah Barhani, a Kfar Batya graduate, "the community asked them (the graduates) to become leaders (for which reason they had been sent)." Zimnah was subsequently invited to a wedding and asked to officiate. "A duty which had previously been the priests." (Interview in Kamon (ed.), *First Bridge*, p.179).

<sup>224</sup> See S. Kaplan, 'Leadership and Communal Organization,' pp.154-163.

practices and customs which they had adopted.<sup>225</sup> Several former students also recollect that on their visit to villages such as Wezabä and Ambobär, they were met with tremendous excitement.<sup>226</sup>

The graduates of the schools, together with Yona Boggalä and his colleagues, also caused the following processes or events to occur in Falasha society on the return to their villages<sup>227</sup>:-

1) The newly educated Falashas, on their return to their villages, stirred up a great desire to study, especially among the youth.<sup>228</sup>

2) The Kfar Batya graduates would appear to have initiated a connection, especially among the youth, with Israel and world Jewry. The self image of many slowly began to change as they increasingly identified themselves with world Jewry.

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<sup>225</sup> Interviews with Abreham Kahati by Belaynesh Zevadiah, 23 September 1991; Yosef Zevadiah by Steve Kaplan, 23 June 1991.

<sup>226</sup> Interview with Abreham Kahati by Belaynesh Zevadiah, 23 September 1991.

<sup>227</sup> See also Abbink, 'Ethiopian Jewish Missionary,' pp. 21-32.

<sup>228</sup> Interview with Yehuda Sivan by Kaplan, 31 July 1991 and ORT report, 20 March 1959, ZA. On seeing the graduates from Kfar Batya dressed so well, Abreham Kahati claims that many families wanted to send their children to the Jewish Agency schools. (Interview with Abreham Kahati, 23 September 1991, by Belaynesh Zevadiah).

3) Certain traditional Jewish practices slowly began to penetrate specific groups of Falashas in several villages.<sup>229</sup>

4) The graduates undoubtedly encouraged the gathering, in November 1957, of 1000 Falashas in Ambobär from all over Ethiopia, during which they demonstrated their desire to live according to Jewish tradition.<sup>230</sup>

5) The young educated Falashas were increasingly seen and saw themselves as new leaders.<sup>231</sup>

It is therefore indisputable that the Jewish Agency's programme in Ethiopia during the 1950's initiated a process which would gradually but inevitably transform Falasha society.<sup>232</sup> Indeed, subsequent Jewish visitors to Ethiopia commented on the tremendous changes that were taking place in many Falasha villages. Wolf Leslau, for example, who had visited the Falasha village of Ambwora in 1946, commented

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<sup>229</sup> Interview with Sivan, 31 July 1991 by Kaplan. These included the observance of festivals mentioned above, lighting candles on the sabbath, and the usage of traditional Jewish liturgy.

<sup>230</sup> Sivan to Dept. of Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora, 24 January 1958, SA.

<sup>231</sup> This fact was demonstrated in 1959 when a group of young Falashas presented a petition to Haile Sellassie on behalf of all Falashas to protest about the crimes perpetrated against them by other Ethiopians. (ZA no.C6/470)

<sup>232</sup> It should again be stressed that the Jewish Agency officials' ultimate aim was to transform Falasha society.

on a return visit sixteen years later that:

The situation was not the same when I visited the same village in 1962. Several young Falashas now spoke Hebrew and some elders knew how to read Hebrew. Unlike the practice of former days, the Feast of Hanukkah was celebrated and candles were lit in the synagogue. During the Feast of Tabernacles a booth was built in the compound of a synagogue, a practice not known previously. As for the two young teachers of the village, they wore the prayer shawl during worship.<sup>233</sup>

In the 1970's, Kay Kaufman Shelemay visited the Falasha village of Ambobär and stated that:-

The only part of the Beta Israel New Year celebration familiar to me was a Hebrew prayer service led on New Year's morning by a group of young Falashas who had refused to attend the Ge'ez ritual. They used familiar melodies learned during studies in Israel and from Western Jewish visitors. During the Hebrew services the wooden cabinet in the eastern corner of the room was opened, exposing a miniature Torah scroll, Jewish prayer shawls, and Hebrew prayer books donated by Jews from abroad. The Hebrew service was held facing this

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<sup>233</sup> W. Leslau, 'A Falasha Book of Festivals,' in *For Max Weinreich on his Seventieth Birthday*, (London, 1964), p.187. Also reported in 'Scholars discuss Falashas, ancient texts, Eichmann,' *Jerusalem Post*, 1 August 1965.

makeshift Ark.<sup>234</sup>

Simon Messing's report<sup>235</sup> of a visit to Ethiopia in the early 1950's reveals the changes which were already taking place amongst the Falashas prior to the Jewish Agency's Programme. He declared that in certain villages, which were not isolated in the hills, the Falashas had abandoned the old 'attenqunye' or 'touch-me-not' laws.<sup>236</sup> Secondly, Messing asserted that there were only a half dozen Falasha monks alive at the time of his visit and no new generation was rising to take their place. While the remaining few were still held in awe, they were no longer obeyed with the old fidelity. Thirdly, customs such as the removal of shoes prior to entry into the prayer house had been neglected in certain Falasha villages. Finally, he reported that animal sacrifices were abandoned in many villages.

Although Messing's report did not describe the recent changes which had taken place amongst the Falashas in any great detail,<sup>237</sup> he did bring to light an important factor in the process of change. This was the fact that the ongoing transformation amongst the Falashas was not

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<sup>234</sup> Shelemay, *Song of Longing*, p.39.

<sup>235</sup> Messing, 'Journey to the Falashas,' pp. 28-40.

<sup>236</sup> This was confirmed by one of my informants, Qés Barku, in an interview on 16 May 1995.

<sup>237</sup> It should be noted that most of the traditions he described as having undergone a transformation had in fact been in the process of being neglected from the beginning of the twentieth century.



occurring in a standardised manner throughout the Falasha villages nor in Falasha society as a whole. There were in fact geographical and generational factors which prevented a uniform and uninhibited transformation.

The impact of the Jewish Agency's programme would also appear to have been initially uneven since in most cases, only villages located in the Gondar region and especially, those situated near one of the schools for Falashas,<sup>238</sup> were subject to any modification.<sup>239</sup> The communities which were located in villages in peripheral regions remained largely unaffected.<sup>240</sup> What is more, the youngsters in the susceptible villages adapted more quickly than their elders to adjustments in their religious life.<sup>241</sup> This was due to

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<sup>238</sup> As was mentioned previously, the schools were important as they maintained contact between Ambobär and the outlying villages. (Y. Boggalä, 'Short Memorandum,' 1977) Since Ambobär was a fundamental centre of change and considered by Falashas to be their "new spiritual-religious centre," (Interview with Yosef Zevadiah in Kamon (ed.), *First Bridge*, p.15) the schools were therefore important disseminators of such propaganda.

<sup>239</sup> For this reason, the Tigrean Falashas were largely unaffected by the educational programmes of Faitlovitch and the Jewish Agency. Therefore, according to Kaplan, "existing social, economic and linguistic differences were exacerbated by a growing gap in modernization, education and secularization." (Kaplan, 'Leadership and Communal Organization,' p.162). See also Rosen, 'Similarities and Differences,' pp. 93-108.

<sup>240</sup> The Protestant missionaries also commented on this phenomenon in 1953 in connection with a collection of signatures by the Jewish counter-mission of those Falashas who wanted to go to Israel. They remarked that many had signed from the villages near Gondar but the further from there, the fewer signed. (AR, 1951-54).

<sup>241</sup> This is indicated in Shelemay's report above.

a reluctance on the part of the elders and priests to recognise the young educated Falashas as leaders and also to a desire to maintain their old traditions. In 1973, Uri Ben Baruch, a high priest, described the intergenerational tensions which were prevalent in the Gondar region at the time:-

The young teachers want to lead the people, but the priest and the heads of the elders don't want to surrender their leadership... Because the young teachers have access to the government, Falashas follow them, and only adults and the elderly continue to obey the priests of old.<sup>242</sup>

Despite these pockets of resistance, it is evident that Jewish Agency representatives succeeded where others had clearly failed. Although the Jewish Agency's programme was only in operation in Ethiopia for a number of years as opposed to Faitlovitch's campaign, the former's achievements were evidently much more impressive. It is therefore appropriate to analyse the reasons behind this success.

Although, ostensibly, Faitlovitch did not achieve any real practical results, it may be argued that he indirectly contributed to the Jewish Agency's success. Many of the

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<sup>242</sup> Y. Kahane, *Black Brothers: Life Among the Falashas*, (Tel Aviv, 1977), p.78, as quoted in S. Kaplan and R. Westheimer, *Surviving Salvation: The Ethiopian Jewish Family in Transition*, (New York, 1992), p.21.

programmes which he instigated were continued by the Agency and adapted accordingly. Faitlovitch prepared the ground for a future transformation as he made the Falashas "susceptible for the changes to come, spread out over many years"<sup>243</sup> by introducing them to traditional Judaism and world Jewry.<sup>244</sup> For this reason, Jewish Agency representatives encountered much less opposition from the Falashas than Faitlovitch did in his time.<sup>245</sup> What is more, the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 aroused messianic expectations in Falasha communities. Many Falashas therefore had an incentive to adopt modification in their religion as a 'return to Judaism' was made a prerequisite for immigration to Israel.<sup>246</sup>

Secondly, a leadership of the Falashas was created which strove towards a reformation of Falasha society. Although Faitlovitch also attempted to develop new leaders educated in traditional Judaism, he was unsuccessful in this venture as those whom he trained succumbed to the temptations to

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<sup>243</sup> Abbink, *Falashas in Ethiopia and Israel*, p.91.

<sup>244</sup> Abbink claims that the most important change initiated by Faitlovitch was "the gradual extension of their ethno-religious identity - they were no longer the only Beta Israel or Israelites, but only a small and not even very important part of the 'Israelite' or Jewish world community." (Ibid.)

<sup>245</sup> Interview with Sivan by Kaplan, 31 July 1991.

<sup>246</sup> Leviatan also mentions the fact that the Falasha youth were particularly enthusiastic about the educational programme of the Jewish Agency. They saw education as a means to improving their standard of living, of leaving their village and as a way of getting to Israel. (Leviatan, *Encounter*, p.35).

work for the Ethiopian government.<sup>247</sup>

Thirdly, the Jewish Agency had the resources to develop an extensive educational programme for the Falashas, unlike Faitlovitch. This also had an effect on the competition with the Protestant missionaries who understood that the Jewish counter mission was the strongest attraction for the Falashas.<sup>248</sup> Furthermore, from the inception of the Jewish Agency programme, the pro-Falasha campaign was assisted by such notables as Itsak Ben Zvi, the then President of Israel. He publicised the Falasha cause in Israel and throughout the Jewish western world in order to attract support for the Falashas.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> The new leaders were increasingly seen by external Jewish organisations as the representatives of the Falashas. This was an attempt to "impose an artificial unity on the Beta Israel" in order "to rationalise and simplify the giving of assistance" (Kaplan, 'Leadership and Communal Organisation,' p.161) and the dissemination of propaganda. Indeed, it should be recalled that traditional Falasha society had "no centralised communal institutions capable of making decisions for the group as a whole nor efficient mechanisms for enforcing decisions made at anything other than the village level." (Kaplan, *Beta Israel*, p.133).

<sup>248</sup> CMJ, 'Story of the Mission,' p.8, CMJ Archives, Bodleian, Library and interview with Payne, 10 March 1994. See also Payne, *Ethiopian Jews*, p.87. Conversely, on the closing of the Jewish Agency schools, Payne described the occasion as the "greatest break of the mission." (ORT report, 20 March 1959, ZA)

<sup>249</sup> In the post-Holocaust world, Itsak Ben Zvi, Faitlovitch and others used emotional propaganda to gain support. As we have seen, the Italian fascists were equated with the Nazis and the Falashas' fate under Mussolini was compared to European Jewry's fate under the Nazis. The portrait of the Falasha 'suffering as a Jew' was propagated to encourage sympathy and increase their recognition as Jews by world Jewry. See also Waldman, 'Letters of Itsak Ben Zvi.'

The roads which were constructed during the Italian occupation also assisted the Jewish Agency officials in their task. They connected Falasha villages, which were previously isolated, to the main nuclei of Falasha settlement and centre of modernisation, namely Ambobär and Wezabä. This improvement greatly assisted the flow of change during the years the Jewish Agency was operative in Ethiopia and after.<sup>250</sup>

Finally, the overall conditions in Ethiopia during the period of the Jewish Agency's programme would seem to have been favourable for an initiation of change in Falasha society. As we have seen, Haile Sellassie was particularly supportive of foreign educational projects. Furthermore, Jewish Agency representatives also commented that they experienced little, if any, opposition from local leaders.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Gavrihu to Ben Horin, Israeli Foreign Office, 1 December 1957, SA, document no. 8525/38 and personal communication from Faitlovitch to Messing, 18 September 1950. Messing also wrote in his book that "the modernisation of motor road transport that had developed during the occupation impressed him (Faitlovitch) greatly" as he believed it would contribute to culture change. (Messing, *Story*, p.61).

<sup>251</sup> The only major incident that occurred in the 1950's was the burning down of a Falasha school in Wezabä. Taddäsä Yaqob claimed that the attack was a demonstration by the Christian population of their dissatisfaction towards the transformation of Wezabä and the village school into a centre of propaganda for aliyah. Another motive given was the Christians' fear that the Falashas in certain areas were progressing and advancing and were in a position to oppose the landowners. (Israeli Consulate, Addis Ababa, 5 February 1958, SA no.350.1).

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION: "A CENTURY OF GROSS INTERFERENCE"<sup>1</sup>

"'Traditions' which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented."<sup>2</sup>

As we have seen, the twentieth century had a significant impact on the lives of the Falashas. Through a process of events they were gradually transformed from an existence as Falashas, whose history lay within Ethiopia, into Ethiopian Jews, whose culture, religion, history and identity became increasingly connected with that of the Jews in Diaspora and the State of Israel.<sup>3</sup> Although, as Kaplan states, "the Ethiopian context rarely ceased to be decisive, numerous external variables came increasingly into play"<sup>4</sup> from the mid-nineteenth century, and especially during the twentieth century. In this thesis, I have examined these external factors in some detail and analysed their impact on traditional Falasha society.

In chapter one, the Falashas' religion and society was examined prior to their encounter with Western Judaism. It was shown that, on the whole, their language, dress, diet, family structure and even, religion was remarkably similar

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<sup>1</sup> Shelemay, *Song of Longing*, p.75.

<sup>2</sup> E. Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions' in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge, 1993), p.1.

<sup>3</sup> See Kaplan, *Beta Israel*, p.3.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

to that of their Christian neighbours.<sup>5</sup> We also saw that their religious practices, literature and customs were also very different from traditional Judaism. Finally, we learnt that prior to the twentieth century the Falashas did not consider themselves as 'Jews' in the sense of the name as it is generally understood today nor were they recognised by world Jewry as such.

In the second chapter, the impact of the Protestant missionaries on traditional Falasha society was discussed. It was shown that their activities had the effect of introducing the Falashas to Western modernity and ironically inculcating them with a Jewish identity. The missionaries criticised their peculiar customs and attempted to undermine the Falashas' leadership, preparing the ground for the subsequent endeavours of Jewish visitors. Finally, by treating the Falashas as 'Jews' for the first time, the missionaries brought them to the attention of Western Jewry. "This set in motion processes both in Europe and Ethiopia that irreversibly transformed the course of their history,"<sup>6</sup> initiating "a century of gross interference"<sup>7</sup> of foreign Jewish organisations and individuals in the lives of the Falashas.

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<sup>5</sup> See Kaplan and Rosen, 'Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel,' p.38.

<sup>6</sup> Kaplan, *Beta Israel*, p.138.

<sup>7</sup> Shelemay, *Song of Longing*, p.75.

The next three chapters examined Faitlovitch's essential role in the creation of a Jewish identity for the Falashas. His campaign was aimed at both Western Jewry and the Falashas themselves since he believed that only with the participation of the former would the Falashas adopt traditional Judaism. He portrayed the Falashas as a Jewish tribe out of place in its African environment by equating their history, religion and culture to that of world Jewry. Although, as we have seen, he was unsuccessful in bringing about a transformation of the Falashas through his various programmes, he paved the way for future 'progress' by creating a potential leadership, a suitable atmosphere, and an attractive image of the Falashas as Ethiopian Jews.

The Italian occupation was shown to be a period of relative calm for the Falashas, contrary to what some other writers on the period have claimed. The episode was subsequently distorted and exploited by Itsak Ben Zvi, Jacques Faitlovitch and Pro-Falasha organisations who used emotional propaganda to gain support for the Falashas' cause. As we have seen, the Italian fascists were equated with the Nazis and the Falashas' fate under Mussolini was compared to that of European Jewry under Hitler. The portrait of the Falasha 'suffering as a Jew' was propagated to encourage sympathy and increase their recognition as Jews by the Jewish world.

With the creation of the State of Israel and the start of



the Jewish Agency's activities among the Falashas, the process of change among the Falashas is initiated. One begins to see a gradual adoption of Hebrew and traditional Jewish religious practices and a negation of certain Falasha practices as the Falashas increasingly become transformed into Ethiopian Jews in their own eyes and in the eyes of Western Jewry. Although it would be many years until they were recognised as Jews in the full sense of the word,<sup>8</sup> the process to create an 'Ethiopian Jew' began during this period.

The "century of gross interference" of Jewish organisations and individuals in the Falashas' lives which was initiated in the mid-nineteenth century therefore reached its climax at this point. The efforts of Faitlovitch and his successors to promote change in Falasha society finally began to produce significant results. It is not the purpose of this thesis to criticise these organisations and individuals for their part in this transformation process nor the motives behind their campaign. I do hope, nevertheless, that I have made a useful contribution to the on-going process of 'de-mythologising' the history of the Ethiopian Jews<sup>9</sup> which for too long has been greatly

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<sup>8</sup> The Falashas were not officially recognised as 'Jews' until February 1973 when Ovadiah Yosef, the then Sephardi Chief Rabbi, issued a decree declaring the Falashas to be Jews. (See chapter 1, footnote 12).

<sup>9</sup> At both the First and Second International Congresses of the Society for the Study of Ethiopian Jewry, the necessity of 'de-mythologising' the history of the Ethiopian Jews was stressed.

romanticised and subsequently distorted. I did not set off with the intention of producing a revisionist historical account of the Falashas but in the course of my archival and oral research, the historical inaccuracies in many other accounts became blatantly apparent. In my opinion, the hundred years following 1860 was the most significant era of their history because of the influx of external influences.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, to understand and appreciate the Ethiopian Jews' development, one must turn to an analysis of these catalysts of change during this period of history and hence, to this thesis.

#### POSTSCRIPT

In the next three decades, the pace and degree of change in Falasha society rapidly increased as the number of Jewish visitors to the Falashas escalated. This brought with it an acceleration of culture change as Falashas attempted to disassociate themselves from their Ethiopian environment and background and conform to the precepts of traditional Judaism.

As Shelemay notes, during the 1960s and 1970s, traditional Falasha customs which resembled those of normative Judaism were "emphasised, elaborated and called by Hebrew names" whilst others which were unique to the Falashas were altered considerably. The Falashas also adopted many hitherto unfamiliar Jewish practices. For example, young

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Kaplan, *Beta Israel*, p.143.

people began to hold regular Sabbath morning services in Hebrew and observance of many festivals was altered to reflect normative Jewish practise. Prayer houses were no longer constructed in the traditional round shape with an inner Holy of Holies, but rather as square rooms with Arks on the eastern wall. Imported Jewish prayer shawls began to be worn not only during recital of the Hebrew liturgy but also by the priests over their traditional clothes and turbans during occasions like the *seged* pilgrimage. Furthermore, Hebrew Torah scrolls presented to Falasha villages by foreigners were accorded a place of respect equal to that of the *Orit*. Finally, many villages started to keep an eternal light in the prayer house, a custom unknown to the Falashas prior to the twentieth century and the Star of David was also displayed on Falasha prayer houses with increasing frequency and prominence.<sup>11</sup>

A transformation of the Falashas' identity during the 1960s and 1970s is also apparent in a change in the nature of their craft production. Prior to the 1960s, the work of Falasha craftsmen was "almost totally of a practical nature" hence, virtually all the objects they produced were

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<sup>11</sup> K. Kaufman Shelemay, 'The Beta Israel in Twentieth-Century Ethiopia,' in Avner et al., (eds.), *Jews of Ethiopia*, pp. 43-45. Shelemay notes that "it is sometimes difficult after a half-century of intensive contemporary Jewish influence to ascertain which Judaic elements were present originally and which have been recently adopted." (K. Kaufman Shelemay 'Continuity and Change in the Liturgy of the Falasha' in *Modern Ethiopia: Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, (Nice, 1977), pp.479-487).

common household items for use among the Falashas themselves.<sup>12</sup> However during the 1960s, "to appeal to Jewish tourists and highlight their own evolving religious orientation" Falasha women from the village of Wälläqa began to produce figurines of 'rabbis' with Torah scrolls, Solomon and Sheba statuettes, lions crowned with Jewish stars, and models of other Jewish themes.<sup>13</sup>

This unprecedented contact with the Falashas also had the added affect of an increased recognition of the Falashas as Ethiopian Jews. Visitors observed the apparently Jewish nature of their religion, customs and way of life and accepted their affiliation to world Jewry. The irony lies in the fact that this transformation from Falasha, as described in chapter one, to Ethiopian Jew had been initiated, encouraged and shaped by Jews during the course of the twentieth century.

More significant for the Falashas today is the change in their self definition which began in this period,

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<sup>12</sup> See Abdussamad H. Ahmad, 'Crafts Production of the Beta Israel (Falasha) in Gondar 1900-1935,' Appleyard et al., (eds.), *Proceedings*.

<sup>13</sup> S. Kaplan and C. Rosen, 'Created in Their Own Image: A Comment on Beta Israel Figurines,' *Cahiers d'études africaines* (forthcoming). Kaplan and Rosen assert that "almost from the outset, the Wälläqa figurines were the subject of confusion and misunderstanding." In early 1993, the Museum of the Negev displayed these figurines in an exhibition entitled 'The Sheba Exhibition.' They were described as "traditional artistic Ethiopian ceramics and pottery with parallel objects found in archaeological digs in Israel." (See Hobsbawm, 'Introduction,' p.1).

undoubtedly encouraged by foreign Jewish visitors, and which continued after their arrival in Israel. Two contentious and crucial indicators of group identity and its transformation are myths of origins and names.<sup>14</sup> As "myths of origin usually tell us more about how a people view themselves and would like to be seen by others, than they do about any 'historical' reality," it is understandable that this subject has been a source of considerable controversy between scholars and Falasha welfare organisations.<sup>15</sup> The Falashas living in Israel today almost unanimously reject any association with the Solomon-Sheba legend which would connect them to Ethiopian society and culture. Rather, "they prefer to present themselves as descendants of Jews who followed the Biblical Prophet Jeremiah to Egypt or, in keeping with rabbinic opinion, descendants of the lost tribe of Dan."<sup>16</sup> These theories both separate the Falashas from the Christian

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<sup>14</sup> Kaplan, 'Invention of Ethiopian Jews,' p.651.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Kaufman Shelemay reports that "by 1986, the tension that had increasingly permeated my personal relations with the leaders of one activist organization became public when I was invited to guest curate an exhibition on the Ethiopian Jews at the Jewish Museum in New York City. Although we mounted what was generally a well-received exhibition, several individuals protested the representation of the Beta Israel as part of Ethiopian culture, laying the blame at my feet. They demanded that my recently published book, copies of which were on sale at the Museum gift shop along with other writings about the Beta Israel be removed from the shelves." (Shelemay, *Song of Longing*, pp. 150-51).

<sup>16</sup> Kaplan, 'Invention of Ethiopian Jews,' p. 652.

Ethiopians, while emphasising their links to other Jews.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, the Falashas nowadays prefer to call themselves 'Ethiopian Jews' rather than Beta Israel, a name that linked them to Ethiopia's Israelite (Solomonic) heritage, or Falasha, a term strongly rejected by them as derogatory. As Kaplan claims, "far more significant than their abandonment of the (in Ethiopian terms) positive appellation of 'Beta Israel' is their willingness to embrace the hitherto negative label of 'Jew.'" In their choice of names, as in their selection of origin stories, Kaplan concludes, "we find a vivid testimony to the new identity they have begun to assume."<sup>18</sup>

In this thesis, I have resisted the temptation to discuss in any detail the complex situation of the Falashas in Israel today. None the less, it is my opinion that some of the problems encountered by the Falashas at present are a result of Israeli government officials' overlooking the fact that the concept of an 'Ethiopian Jew' is an invented

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<sup>17</sup> The Falashas have also altered or been encouraged to alter other aspects of their history in Ethiopia in order to draw parallels between their experience and 'other' Jewish diaspora communities. For example in 1960, several anonymous Falashas, in a letter to an unnamed Israeli organisation, wrote that "we Falashas are Jews from the ancient times and up to this day are being persecuted by the Christian population: The church accuses us as Jews, of having crucified Jesus, and that for this reason we are the enemies of God whose curse rests upon us. Also that whoever persecutes us the more, is exacting revenge for the blood of Jesus." (18 February 1960, ZA no.C6/470).

<sup>18</sup> Kaplan, 'Invention of Ethiopian Jews,' pp.653-4.

twentieth century phenomenon, imposed on the Falashas by external forces. I would not dare to question the genuine desire of many to adhere to traditional Judaism. However, at the same time, their rich history and culture which is in great danger of becoming forgotten by young Ethiopian Jews in their eagerness to become part of mainstream Israeli society should be appreciated and recorded accurately and objectively.

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